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Shouvik Narayan Hore
The Sanskrit College and University, Kolkata, India.

"The Hermit Sits A(ll) (in) One": Linguistic Equivocations in "Tintern Abbey"

Abstract: The source meaning and its analytic worth in William Wordsworth's "Lines, Composed a Few Miles Above Tintern Abbey on Revisiting the Banks of the Wye During a Tour. July 13, 1798," are rendered oblivious to us, I argue, when one does not take into account the fact that Wordsworth's connotations are hid across both English and German lexicons, allowing him the advantage of linguistic polyvalency, alongside its ambiguity. Wordsworth's meanings across the words "one," "all," "still," "man," and "sublime" overlap, forcing his readers to recognize two important implications: first, that Wordsworth, almost authoritatively, upholds the traditional hierarchy between genders; second, that the poem's objective meanders into an ideology, where the pluralization of the Wordsworthian "men" is posited as the primary, pedagogical objective in Wordsworth's poem. Psychoanalytic nuances, carefully incorporated within Wordsworth's narration, uphold his central doctrine which, theoretically, fosters the de-feminization of Dorothy towards the end of the poem—a conscious stance undertaken at the risk of traditional readings and interpretation of Dorothy's empowerment in the poem. The paper concludes with a fresh take on Dorothy's prolonged illness since the early 1830s, where I argue that it was psycho-physiological, triggered by her Wordsworthian sacrifice.

Keywords: Sublimity, manner, inter-linguistic epistemologies, scopophilia, Wordsworth

Introduction

Consider the last four lines of the first verse paragraph of William Wordsworth's blank verse poem, "Tintern Abbey":

> With some *uncertain* notice, as *might seem*
> Of vagrant dwellers in the houseless woods,
> Or of *some* Hermit's cave, where by his fire
> The Hermit sits a l o n e. (Wordsworth, lines 19-22, both forms of emphasis mine)

The uncertainty within the quotation arises from both objective and subjective quarters: on the one hand, the implications in "vagrant dwellers," despite its oxymoronic worth is equalized with the anaphoric implications in "houseless woods," leading to the juxtaposition of the anaphoric oxymoron. Both remain within objective, perceptual quarters—within the "uncertain notice" of the poet, as "might seem" to the readers. It is also of importance, that the objective, perceptual quarters are in the plural ("dwellers," "houseless woods"), whereas the two images in the third line of the quote are compressed singularities, while maintaining the original, objective, pluralizing, "uncertain" directives here as well ("some Hermit's cave"). From this point onward, perceptive (un)concreteness sacrifices its objectivity, and is firmly installed in the subjective, ascetic domain, as he "sits alone." Why does the Hermit's isolative singularity take mechanical precedence over the objective pluralities of Wordsworth's landscape, towards the termination of the verse paragraph? Why is sitting "alone" worth more to the poet, over the mutable uncertainty in his earlier lines?

I argue, to begin with, that Wordsworth's use of the English word "alone" would not suffice to provide us with the full meaning of his intentions: it is plausible that he is playing across the amalgamation of two English words, "all" and "one," and the implications of the two German words: "alle" (and its derivatives "aller" and "alles") ("all/e" 7), which could assume a multiplicity of absolute meanings, such as "above all" and "all in all," for which an excellent case can be made in "Tintern Abbey" when the poet remarks that: "The coarser pleasures of my boyish days, / And their glad animal movements all gone by / To me was all in all" (Wordsworth, lines 73-75).

And the other word "one," which is synonymous with the implications of the German word "Man" ("One," 414, "Man" (pronoun)), provides the readers with two sets of inter-linguistic, Anglo-Germanic meanings: in English, the word "alone" becomes denotative of isolation, probably ascetism (Gk. *Asketikos*, meaning rigorous self-discipline, practicing self-denial, religiously) in the current context, synonymous with the German *allein*. However, if one were to bring the second set of German meanings of "alone" into enquiry, juxtaposing the implications of the "all and all," compelling "one" to collapse into the German "Man" which, when it overlaps with the English "man" (German: *Mann*), bears an absolute set of near-apocalyptic meanings, based on its perceptive uncanny and linguistic proximities: first, Wordsworth's "alone" is an absolute state of being, the "all in all" of ontology; secondly, the "all in all" of ontology, being absolute, *must* be Manly or masculine: "I think abstractly; therefore, I am masculine" (Essick 295). To be alone is to be a Universal, and to Universalize, or to be able to Universalize, is to be a Man, despite its underlying ambiguities, both intra and extra-linguistic.

What I have argued in the earlier paragraph is far from speculative analysis: there is textual evidence behind this inaugural argument. On March 11, 1798, William Wordsworth writes to James Losh that he wishes to travel to Germany "in order to acquire the German language" (Selincourt ed. 189). Or, Dorothy Wordsworth's letter to Mary Hutchinson from Goslar in November, 1798, stating that Wordsworth had "gone on improving in that respect" (Selincourt ed. 203)—an argument reinforced in John Worthen's *The Life of William Wordsworth: A Critical Biography* (Wiley Blackwell, 2014).[1] Despite the contradiction in terms of the progress actually achieved, it is probable that Wordsworth would utilize linguistic equivocation as a tool for intensifying, and complicating the fundamental, surfacing simplicity of his statement. Provocations are enrichments, and often contribute in distributing its truth-value across linguistic margins by weaponizing equivocation, by first disguising it, thus perpetuating the false consciousness that what does exist, *does not* exist, at first. The latent meaning of the use of the words "one," "man," "all," and occasionally "still" is spread across the poetic body of "Tintern Abbey." Consider these, as representative examples of the meaning of "man" in the poem, in accordance with our new methodology:

> These beauteous forms,
> Through a long absence, have not been to me
> As is a landscape to a blind *man's* eye…
> As have no slight or trivial influence
> On that best portion of a good *man's* life…
> Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
> And the round ocean and the living air,
> And the blue sky, and in the mind of *man*…
> With lofty thoughts, that neither evil tongues,
> Rash judgments, nor the sneers of selfish *men*…

[1] They talked German to the "people of the house" whenever they could and read what could get hold of, but they were not able to make much progress (180).

Shall e'er prevail against us, (Wordsworth, lines 22-24, 32-33, 97-99, 127-28, 132, italics mine)

The first italicized "man" refers back to the isolated "Hermit," who is presumably blind to the objective pluralizations of the world, concentrating on the meditative objectless, objectiveless, extra-material subjectivity of the world, but with a difference: Wordsworth is eager to demonstrate the oxymoronic potential of the "blind man," for the "one," the "all in all," being absolute, is blind to nothing, or need not prove his sight to mortals; its oxymoronic potential is enhanced if we read into the possibility of the "blind man" being an innuendo for the effeminate, or the feminine. This is furthered by the entrance of the "best" in a "good man's life" who, being one, the "all in all," and universal, can only be as indispensable as the Universal categorical imperative, symbolized by the "good" abstractly, as Robert Essick has already notified. The "mind of man," read as the point of origin for the "good man's life," is the "awesome noumenal oneness behind the phenomenal multiplicity of *things*" (Randel 385). The Universal, or absolute Mind, is more perfect, more masculine, the "best portion" within the perception of a Moral, masculine Universe, to rephrase Wordsworth's meaning. Men, however, in Wordsworth's "selfish men," takes on a negative connotation: Wordsworth is opposed to the pluralization of the "one," something that could be associated with his later, Christian conservatism, and something to which I shall return to, in the third part of the essay. One could make a sturdy case for it via Wordsworth's reference to the Satanic in "evil tongues," where good, contrasted with evil, is able to carefully maneuver flickering into sneering, implying that the Utterance must not be repeated, or spoken to, for fear of contamination. Dualism, or the replicative tendency, is associated with contamination, and is eventually, unfit, or effeminate for the Universal idea—that the "One" is "All," or, the "All" is in "One," hence "alone." The reinforcement of this, is evident across Wordsworth's poem, when the multiplicity of the "one" never assumes the form of "many" (see "many recognitions," lines 59-60) as it is generally made out to be; instead, Wordsworth complicates its equivocal prerogative even more:

In which the heavy and weary weight
Of *all* this unintelligible world,
Is lightened – …
A motion and a spirit that impels
All thinking things, *all* objects of *all* thought,
And rolls through *All* things…
And of *all* that we behold
From this green earth;
The guide the guardian of my heart, and soul
Of *all* my moral being…
Through *all* the years of this our life, to lead
From joy to joy: …
Our cheerful faith, that *all* which we behold
Is full of blessings…
For *all* sweet sounds and harmonies; (Wordsworth, lines 39-40, 100-102, 104-05, 110-11, 124-25, 132-34, emphasis mine)

The Universal masculine, when pitted against the "unintelligible world," seems meaningless, because of its replicative abilities that deter, and defer the disguised monopoly in Wordsworth's inter-linguistic delineations. The false consciousness that nature was "all in all" had to be rectified in the maturer phase of abstraction, which maintains the hierarchy parallel across both metaphysics and society—abstraction above concretion, man above woman. This is why "A spirit," or "One spirit" eventually directs the universal materialism of things, subrepting its universality, depriving it of its masculinity, as it "rolls through." This

newly subrepted universality, now no longer ascertained by materiality, rightfully becomes the immaterial subjective wealth of the poet's "moral being," of him and himself "alone," resonating the transference of discursive posture from the hermit to the poet, from the "many" to the "one," to the "my." Nature, now the inferior tendency, is relegated to the feminine: "Nature never did betray / The heart that loved her" (Wordsworth, lines 122-23). A Christian, monotheistic Universality emerges when Wordsworth echoes the fulness of "blessings," probably insisting that from oneness derives this fulness, while the "we," as I shall argue towards the end of the essay, is the ideological objective of the "one" Wordsworth Wordsworthianized to become one world, with "all" in "one" generating the false consciousness of an "us" between the lines. It would be echoed in, at least, three more synonymities across "Tintern Abbey":

> More like a man
> Flying from something that he dreads than *one*
> Who sought the thing he loved…
> …but hearing oftentimes
> The *still*, sad music of humanity…
> Therefore am I *still*
> A lover of the meadows and the woods,
> And mountains. (Wordsworth, lines 70-72, 91-92, 102-104, emphasis mine)

Notable here is the admiration built within the ideological structure of the "one" that acknowledges its earlier inability to enforce a paradigm shift in his "boyish days" (73), the primal phase of conceptual impotency. To seek the "thing" would be scent-marking failure, as Wordsworth wants to communicate, for incapacity towards detachment is gendered. That could be one reason why the boyish lover uses polysyndeton across the two verse lines ("the meadows and the woods, / And mountains"), hinting at the natural burden he has to bear lovingly, the projection *as* the real, betraying, if not narrowly missing the sublime potential of an asyndeton at this juncture of his verse paragraph. Noteworthy also is his progression from those "boyish days," for the disinterested recipient of that "still, sad music" is able to recognize its own inducement of experiential infinity in contact with nature, and the ideological fallacy built within the stilled, oneness of transitional likeness to infinity within natural (read a conceptual) microcosms. The perpetuation of nostalgia is "still" ongoing, while nature herself, in her projection of infinity during the poet's "boyish days," has been stilled (gone silent, rendered dead), owing to the ideological fallacy of such an exertion. A oneness with the recognition of what is not, when nostalgically detached, is "still" oneness with that "all in all," with the Universal masculine, and a conscious inhibition of anything else. Thus, the absorption of all particular meanings within one universal particular resolves Wordsworth's anxiety regarding unstable, inter-linguistic meanings, but to what end? He clarifies immediately after:

> To them I may have owed another gift,
> Of aspect more sublime…
> …a sense sublime
> Of something far more deeply interfused,
> Whose dwelling is the light of setting suns,
> And the blue sky… (Wordsworth, lines 36-37, 95-98)

The topographic sublimity in these lines, from one perspective, could be restored from the sublime picturesque, as illustrated by Jacqueline M. Labbe in *Romantic Visualities: Landscape, Gender and*

Romanticism (Palgrave Macmillan, 1998).[2] This is not the line of argument deemed exact for the essay. I proffer, instead, that Wordsworth's "aspect" and "sense" of sublimity is situated in the grey zone of cross-linguistic meanings, where oneness is accomplished not through elimination, but repressive subjugation—hence the uncertain anxiety regarding the return of the repressed ("more," "something far more"), and its castrative potential. Wordsworth, as has been argued previously, is not concerned with the picturesque of landscape, but the linguistic landscape of the "mind of man," while applying to it the referential trope of "natural landscape." The sublime becomes the antinomial moment of equivocative triumph—its universal oneness, achieved epiphanically, becomes unsustainable as soon as it is realized. The "dwelling" in the above-mentioned quotation is uncannily similar to the "vagrant dwellers" in the first verse paragraph, perhaps as a reminder of the vagrancy of natural "dwelling," contrasted with the logocentric stability of equivocated, linguistic superiority. I will return to this section of the discussion towards the end. The four introductory conclusions that Wordsworth arrives at can be represented through these following points:

The One is the Absolute.
The Absolute is all in all.
The all in all, must be Manly.
Manliness in sublime.

Dorothy's Wordsworth: Flaunts and Faults

Wordsworth's "Tintern Abbey," read through these equivocative, linguistic strategies, would give one the impression that its prolonged linguistic association is probably etymological. True as it might be, Wordsworth's immediate linguistic affinity is derived from Dorothy Wordsworth's *Alfoxden Journal*, written in 1798. His ultimate poetical strategy finds its fundamentals through the derivatives, through its linguistic blind spots, by reworking and reconceptualizing them. How is this possible?

The "green paths," "streams," "lines of water running between the ridges," and the garden "gay with flowers" (Woof ed., 141) in Dorothy's *Journal* entry on January 20, 1798, bear an uncommon similarity with the "green hue," "mountain-springs," "little lines of sportive wood" and the "orchard tufts," in "Tintern Abbey" (l. 13, 3, 15-16, 11). The "beautiful beds of smoke" (Woof ed. 142) in Dorothy's entry on January 23, become Wordsworth's "wreaths of smoke" (l. 17), while the "murmur of the village stream" on January 27, in her entry becomes "a soft inland murmur" in Wordsworth's poem (l. 4). The "interesting groups of human creatures," (Woof ed. 149) in her March 10 entry become Wordsworth's "vagrant dwellers" (l. 20) who cannot exactly be identified, and yet they *are*. While the allusive tendencies exhibited here are meant to be representational, there are two different versions that could be extrapolated from these harmless similarities. First, these almost straightforward, allusive references embed in themselves meanings that are less concrete than they usually seem; phrases such as "uncommon majesty" in the *Alfoxden Journal* (Woof ed. 144) convey more uncertainty than at first glance. Dorothy is not sure, or is inexact over what is uncommon about it, or why the moon's fulness has kingliness written all over it. This abstraction is conveyed in Dorothy's entry on February 27, where she finds the prospect "*mildly* beautiful" (Woof ed. 148, original emphasis). This uncertainty is an uncertainty over the obscurity surrounding the less concrete; while she is certain about the linguistic foundations of definite things, it assumes anxiety when the definable over-exerts its limitations and definitions, or when the sublime reaches out to the conceptual periphery of the conceptually definable "beautiful," illustrated in the latter quote. As Meena

[2] "the sublime experience cancels the feminine subject; constructed as it is in masculine images of transcendence and escape, there is no room for even a feminine approximation, since under these terms an approximation would no longer be, by definition, the 'true' sublime" (44).

Alexander rightly avers, "Dorothy keeps quite chastely to the givenness of things, drawing back from speculation" (175). Therefore, one could argue that the abstract, metaphysical realm in Dorothy's prose is left undone, to be dealt over in Wordsworth's poetry, which genders both literary forms (Romantic prose in journal entries becomes feminine, Romantic metaphysics in verse becomes masculine). It also genders, in a Kantian manner, the realms of the sublime (uncommon, indefinable, unlimited) and the beautiful (common, definable, limited). Secondly, we ought to resume advancing into provocative linguistic strategies, where one word does not lead to one meaning in one language, but at least two in two inter-linguistic contexts. Take these two examples, for instance:

> Nor less, I trust,
> To them I may have owed another *gift*,
> Of aspect more sublime; …
> Not for this
> Faint I, nor mourn nor murmur; other *gifts*
> Have followed; (l. 35-37, 85-87, my emphasis)

In both these quotations, one observes that while "gift" can be interpreted as something positive, something infinite exchanged for the materially transient, hence sublime, for greater efficiency in Wordsworth's adult life, I am inclined to disagree. I argue that he is equivocating upon the German word "gift," meaning venom or toxin (94). What Wordsworth means, unconventionally, is this: he owes, to the memory of the landscape where the ruins of the Tintern Abbey were situated, the source of his original poison, which, in its seeming harmony and co-operative naturalness, had blindfolded Wordsworth to the more toxic, urban venomousness that he is now confronted with, and cannot materially resolve. It is the consumption of his earlier venom which allows him to withstand the worse effects of this one, and it is only in this stricter sense that Wordsworth finds it a sublime "gift"—allowing the psyche to perpetuate the false consciousness of eternal childhood as toxic which, when properly consumed, assumes the highest common denominator of moral cleansing when faced with far worse, in terms of toxic magnitudes. Similarly, "other gifts" have followed, meaning that other toxins have compensated immensely for Wordsworth's naïve association with nature as a repository of harmlessness; he looks back at the tolerable, life-affirming toxin instead of the life-threatening ones, and in its ability to arrest the worst consequences of the latter toxins. This is a meaning that remains inaccessible to the "givenness" of Dorothy; the provocative equivocation of language abstracts Romantic meanings, especially in verse, making it obscure, a potent symbol of the Romantic masculine, as illustrated in this paragraph. This is something that Wordsworth flaunts, and is registered as a Dorothean "flaw"; the concreteness of abstraction is much more complicated than nature versus culture; it becomes a discourse between the magnitude of toxicity versus the moral superiority of the individual harnessing its benefits, material and metaphysical.

Interestingly, inaccessibility through equivocative language is the resultant of an original displacement within selfhood itself; Wordsworth does not simply look back at nature because it nourishes, or elevates him mechanically. There is that possibility of nature (and his own, former nature) *stimulating* him, which is then figuratively and metaphorically presented by him as displaced stimulation, but stimulation still. Observe the way Wordsworth looks back—rather than looking into the present "past" of "Tintern Abbey":

> I again repose
> Here, under this dark sycamore, and *view*…
> Once again I *see*
> These hedgerows, hardly hedgerows, little lines…
> Oh! Yet a little while

> May I *behold* in thee what I was once, …
> Our cheerful faith, that all which we *behold*
> Is full of blessings. (ll. 9-10, 14-15, 119-120, 133-134, emphasis mine)

What Wordsworth views, sees and beholds has little or nothing to do with the Abbey itself, or with the prospective landscape in particular; when he reposes under the sycamore, he views his former self's participation in that landscape, for he can barely look beyond himself—a characteristic peculiar with Wordsworth amongst the other Lake Poets. As he sees once again, one can discern that his primary interest does not lie in identifying the hedgerows, but on his latent emphasis on "again"—once again, Wordsworth finds himself voyeuristically looking at himself five years back when he faltered at identifying those hedgerows, as he does now. This becomes more and more explicit when he drops the veil of nature-spectacle and concentrates upon himself in the disguise of pedagogy, which introduces us, in reality, to the two Wordsworths at work in "Tintern Abbey"—not William and Dorothy, but William Junior, who is voyeurized upon by William senior, two similar but not exactly identical men, at this point—or even more disturbingly, the one a man, the other a child that grows into the body of the man. Why then, does he disguise himself with natural projections when he is actually looking at his own self? Is it wrong to argue that Wordsworth is stimulated by his former self, and being embarrassed at this stimulation, sexual or otherwise, must disguise his new knowledge in the Adamic fashion from God, using nature to cover up his own eyes from his own self?

Sigmund Freud, in his *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* argues in favor of scopophilia, the "pleasure of looking," but it "becomes a perversion… if, instead of being *preparatory* to the normal sexual aim, it supplants it" (qtd. in Gay 251). Wordsworth's stimulation is, from this intellectual angle, perverted, if we were to posit that any secondary stimulation is still, primarily, a sexual stimulation at its origin. Call it *sublimated scopophilia*, if you will. But it does not alter the phenomenon that Wordsworth is forbidden to look upon himself, or 'him-selves,' his own other selves, as it is not socially acceptable. Yet, Wordsworth can only find the stimulation for his answers by looking back at himself and sublimating his findings. This is the Wordsworthian *manner*, to put it playfully, for he is not concerned with a masculine sublimation of nature, but with a way of disguising his own experimental methodology, which could be construed as perverted. Therefore, the manner of Wordsworth's pedagogy must coincide with its equivocative, German counterpart—the pluralization of men, the German "manner" (*Oxford Dictionary* 138), beginning with the senior and junior William, despite the controversy mentioned earlier. The *manner*, or the pluralization of men, is meant to originate from the different selves of William himself, followed by a careful inhibition of the earlier practice, and the displacement of his original stimulation onto other man-like characters, who shall then inherit and suppress its origin for its social dogma, keeping alive its acquired knowledge and expanding it in the process without expounding on its origin or returning to question Wordsworth's methodology. To what extent is Wordsworth embarrassed with his own sublimated scopophilia, or the lack thereof, in the fourth verse paragraph of the poem? His penchant for retreating within himself reveals the answer to his question:

> When like a roe
> I bounded o'er the mountains, by the sides
> Of the deep rivers, and the lonely streams,
> Wherever nature led—more like a man
> Flying from something that he dreads than one
> Who sought the thing he loved. For nature then
> (The coarser pleasures of my boyish days,
> And their glad animal movements all gone by)

> To me was all in all. (ll. 67-75)

Wordsworth is ashamed of the physicality of his stimulations, when one notes the animal imagery at work in his text: "like a roe" is anxiously modified into "like a man," which is a mnemonic error, since he was yet to become a man, if one were to overlook its figurative significance for the literal. The act of "flying from something" insists upon flying from that which is natural, the pursuit of which, like expressing love for nature as a mother-figure, could eventually lead to his castration from nature at one level, and from himself at another—"Nature teaches him to look beyond nature. This is the pattern of sublimation: cut off from his mother's love, the boy searches for it everywhere else" (Homans 56). He must find and recreate that nature in his younger self when older, drawing upon his "coarser pleasures" of beastly stimulation for sublimation, and rationalization, and for future pedagogy. It is designated by the poet who "sought the thing he loved," the thing being himself objectified in the past, but available for reconstruction to his present self. The ashamedness is also at display within the two lines in brackets, where Wordsworth's naked, physical pleasures desperately seek substitutes for its original penile objective—his communion and consummation with nature, as Jacques Derrida brilliantly demonstrates in his essay on the subject:

> Dreams of nakedness, then, calling forth, a feeling of modesty or shame [*scham*]. They are in fact "typical," only by virtue of their association with embarrassment, confusion, discomfort. This "core of their content" can subsequently lend itself to all sorts of transformations, revisions, translations. Nakedness gives place to substitutes… All the examples suggested by Freud concern men, and men exhibiting the lack of a phallic attribute, somewhat affected by this exhibitionist activity. Even more precisely: their nakedness does not reveal the penis or the lack of penis, but rather the absence of the phallus as an attribute to fill a possible gap, the absence of the colossal double. (34-35, translated by Willis Domingo, James Hulbert, Moshe Ron and M.—R.L, italics in original)

Wordsworth makes a desperate, if embarrassing and perverted attempt at that "colossal double," and acquires it, much to his triumph, which, although we do not recognize it initially, is the central triumph of the poem. The younger self of his "boyish days" is gone, but it has gone within, never to be ejaculated or ejected as it is. That it must be kept to himself and substituted or sustained with identical accomplishments is central to the text as well, and its underlying anxiety. I will advance, at this point, to proffer that Wordsworth's *manner*, beyond his sublimated scopophilia, is twofold. First, he must devise a method which convinces him of the holographic omnipresence of his earlier self at all points in order to maintain its textual- sexual impact. This is an essential substitute for the sustenance of the illusion that the "coarser pleasures" of the younger body, acquired animalistically, although lost, have left behind a younger self as its stimulative after-presence. Juxtaposed upon this primary false consciousness is the secondary false consciousness that pedagogizes it in its own peculiar ideology—that the predecessors and successors of this particular "gift" (I use it in both its meanings) of phallocentric knowledge are its pluralization, in its peculiar strength that masculinizes mankind, repressing its scopophilic origins and maintaining the false consciousness that its sublimated gift is self-standing, for civilizational ends. The combination of both primary and secondary aims gives rise to a second set of Wordsworthian pedagogy with four slightly different, if not divergent doctrines:

Manner is sublime.
Sublimity is all in Man.
Absolute *Manner* is sublime.
Pedagogy is manly.

It is under these extreme circumstances that a third non-male self, aside from the boyish and the older William, is introduced to the text: Dorothy Wordsworth. What role does she play in Wordsworth's pedagogy? Does she play a role, with her biological self, in the presence of universal constrictions? Is she Dorothy at all towards the end of the text, or is she Wordsworth's sister, removed from her earlier self, a participant in the universal, sublime *manner*? If not, what are the visible consequences of not playing a role she was designated for, since it has been proven that pedagogy is gendered?

Wordsworth's Dorothy: Faults and Flaunts

I would interpret, first of all, that *manner* must be a proliferation of the masculine, which is not equivalent to the "selfish men" that Wordsworth had sneered against in his final verse paragraph of the poem. This differentiation is the key to the more complicated gender hierarchies created within child and man, beast and child, man and woman, brother and sister, beautiful and sublime, and the material versus the spiritual. One ought to ascribe this proliferation to an increase in the "man," or his objective in creating 'mans,' not men. This is an important conceptual distinction between its biological influx and its contradictory, ideological extreme—a hint probably dropped by Wordsworth in the final verse paragraph of "Tintern Abbey":

> When thy mind
> Shall be a *mansion* for all lovely forms,
> Thy memory be as a dwelling place
> For all sweet sounds and harmonies; (ll. 139-142, italics mine)

This newly-acquired necessity for a "mansion" of "forms" leads to a Platonic abstraction put into effect in the earlier section, where the ideological man multiplies in number for the sustenance of Wordsworth's sublime pedagogy. I would further insist that the redundant limitations of a word like 'pluralization' ought to be substituted for a word that does not, simplistically, assert penile, reproductive increase—alternatively, I suggest 'plurification' since it substitutes the phallic for the merely penile, and the ideological for the reproductive, a "colossal double," to recall Derrida in "The Purveyor of Truth." Plurification could be defined, for the purposes of "Tintern Abbey" as the amplified plurality, or the pluralized amplification of Wordsworth's "mans" who consider it their responsibility to drive home the pedagogy of his sublimated scopophilia, while sustaining the false consciousness that that which *is not*, actually *is*, while that which *is*, must be perpetuated into a linguistic *différance*. The "dwelling place" of the pedagogical mind becomes nothing more that the sublimated version of the "vagrant dwellers" without a home in the first verse paragraph of the text. The Wordsworth of his "boyish days" is rendered inaccessible from this point onwards, but it leaves a younger and conceptually indifferent Dorothy ["When these wild ecstasies shall be matured / Into a sober pleasure" (138-39)] exposed to Wordsworthian indoctrination *vis-à-vis* infantilization. Therefore, when he harangues his sister by stating that, "Oh! Yet a little while / May I behold in thee what I was once, / My dear, dear Sister!" (ll. 119-121), Heidi Thomson avers that this address to Dorothy is nothing more than Wordsworth's "narcissistic projection" (541). William wants to see himself in Dorothy (by seeing himself in her, she must be removed from herself), which is a reminder of his scopophilic aim, but which serves a sinister motif: by visualizing himself, that is, his younger, inhibited self in her, Wordsworth is inclined upon defeminizing, or permanently differing and deferring Dorothy's givenness, her familiarity with the feminine, for the achievement of his extreme aim of perpetuating the Wordsworthian pedagogy, acting upon an innate anxiety that unless it happens so, "the creative joy, will die" (Bloom 135). I shall substitute the word "joy" for *manner*, for this plurification of the creative "manner" is the only pedagogical aim, the way to go, through the pluralized amplification of man. The process becomes narcissistic: Dorothy is reduced, through the projection of Wordsworth's

younger self on his sister—Wordsworth's Dorothy, not Dorothy Wordsworth, from this point onwards. While it is carefully implied that the poet and his sister constitute a team, I shall settle for its German counterpart, "mannschaft" (139), which, aside from suggesting that Wordsworth and Wordsworth's sister, (and not Wordsworth and Dorothy) are a team, for it authenticates his pedagogical aim, creates a more elevatory possibility for him and his "mans" as the true team "now," unlike the false team "once." The final order of modification is as follows:

> The unfeminine is absolute.
> The absolute is all in all.
> The all in all is sublime.
> The unfeminine is manly.

Frances Wilson, in *The Ballad of Dorothy Wordsworth* (2021) is aware of Wordsworth pushing through this guilt involving Dorothy's defeminization: he "clearly felt responsible for Dorothy's state…[but] he missed where his responsibility might lie" (244). One could now argue where his irresponsibility lay—in draining her feminine spirit and accentuating her psychosis. He would sublimate this in his *Postscript* of 1835 when he argues "how distress creeps upon multitudes without misconduct of their own" (qtd. in Owen and Smyser 246), perhaps a carefully disguised, subjective reference to Dorothy's mental distress for no fault of her own, but for being at the wrong place at the wrong time. Dorothy, too, shows an awareness of Wordsworth's commandeering character, when she confesses in a letter to Jane Pollard from Forncett on February 16, 1798, that "William has… a sort of violence of Affection" (Selincourt ed. 83). Wordsworth would further suppress the guilt and disseminate his sublime pedagogy (narcissistically projected, as Thomson tells us) in *The Excursion* (Till ed., first published in 1814), using "Tintern Abbey" as his stepping-stone. Thus, one finds, in Book IV of his epic poem, concrete references to the "Sons of the morning" (Till ed., p. 954, ll. 232), how "Knowing the heart of man is set to be / The centre of this world" (ll. 324-25), or in a somewhat longish passage where he preaches ['mansplains' sounds appropriate here], almost in the manner of "Tintern Abbey," how

> Come labour, when the worn-out frame requires
> Perpetual sabbath; come, disease and want;
> And sad exclusion through decay of sense;
> But leave me unabated trust in thee—
> And let thy favour, to the end of life,
> Inspire me with ability to seek
> Repose and hope among eternal things—
> Father of heaven and earth! (Till ed., ll. 57-65)

Compare its uncanny gendered, and pedagogical similarities with his 1798 text, written nearly two decades earlier:

> If solitude, or fear, or pain, or grief
> Should be thy portion, with what healing thoughts
> Of tender joy wilt thou remember me,
> And these my exhortations! (ll. 143-146)

If one substitutes "thee" with Dorothy in the former passage, and "me" with Wordsworth, the "Father" of his exhortations in the latter, we cannot overlook the blatantly "coarser pleasures" of Wordsworthian

pedagogy—he demands from Dorothy the absolute repression of her femininity, entailing a sacrifice. He cannot demand it from a man, for it would be no sacrifice at all, whereas the sacrifice of Wordsworth's dearest sister would engender gravity to the Romantic, pedagogical discourse of a true and lasting sublime, even at the cost of family. She performs "a double function in the ratification of his achievement of a transcendent subjectivity" (162), as John Barrell concludes in his grim, and radical reading of the poem.

Dorothy's resistance to the idea of a Wordsworthian sacrifice, although never very explicit for obvious reasons (she had been deprived of family life since her parents had died in her youth), can be construed as implicitly rebellious. That she possessed the ability to critique him can be observed in her letter to Jane Pollard where she reacts about Wordsworth's early poetical publications, especially "An Evening Walk," containing "many faults, the chief of which [is] obscurity" (Selincourt ed. 85). A sensitive reader could assess her poem, "Thoughts on My Sick-Bed" (1832) as a textual-sexual resistance to Wordsworth's deliberate, masculine obscurity in "Tintern Abbey," an expression of "suppressed literary talent" (Wilson 246) and a consequent rewriting of the true feminine. Given that her submission was absolute despite the resistance offered, it is also a submission that leads towards a discursive "arrest" of Wordsworth's sublime teleology, where her sickness marks the end of an authoritarian repression through her death. Katherine T. Meiners reads Dorothy's poem along similar lines: "In a utopian construction she *ought* to be revitalized by healing thoughts of William, but here they function as pastiche and grim parody" (494). This could be cognized as the reason behind Edward Quillinan's report upon William's death that Dorothy's mental sickness was temporarily cured, and "she has an absolute *command* of her own will" (qtd. in Wilson 249). Dorothy Wordsworth's exhortations, or exclamations are carefully accumulated in her physical vessel and annihilated with her, both textually and sexually. This is a befitting reply to her original commitment to the Wordsworthian sacrifice, as she becomes the first and only martyr of his sublime ideology.

Conclusions

I return, at the terminating moment of the essay, to the first section of the title of Heidi Thomson's essay "We Are Two": as the essay has consistently argued, there are two languages (German and English), two images (physical and ideological), two ideas (beautiful and the sublime), two genders (man and woman) and two deaths (Wordsworth's younger self and Dorothy) in "Tintern Abbey," courtesy its complicated, but rewarding equivocative strategies. But, from a firmly methodological perspective, Wordsworth's sublime pedagogy remains steadfast in his time-honored denial of the two. Therefore, when he concludes by saying that everything "Were to me / More dear, both for themselves, and for thy sake!" (l. 158-59), there is no urgency in interpreting "thy" as Dorothy; Wordsworth calls out to his "mans," announcing that "We are the Ones," or "Wordsworth (and his Mans) are the Ones," or even "Wordsworth, and Wordsworth's sister (not Dorothy, strictly) are the ones," but never again, that "We are two," for dearer (note the double comparative for emphasis) to Wordsworth is his ideological, phallogocentric construct over its substitute, which is its lack, and cannot be. Dorothy has been perpetually deferred, and his sister baited away for the realization of his "all" in "one."

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Author:
Shouvik Narayan HORE has acquired his Doctorate Degree from Vidyasagar University, India, with a thesis on the Wordsworthian Sublime vis-à-vis Kantian Enlightenment, and is currently a Guest Lecturer at The Sanskrit College and University, Kolkata, India. His recent publications include two edited volumes: *Thematizations of the Goddess in South Asian Cinema* (2022) with Anway Mukhopadhyay, and *Anger in the Long Nineteenth Century: Critical Perspectives* (2023) with Ritushree Sengupta. His essays on Romanticism and the Sublime have been cited in definitive narrative bibliographies, such as that of *The Year's Work in English Studies*, published by Oxford University Press.
Contact: souvikhore94@gmail.com

Lorenz A. Hindrichsen
Copenhagen International School

Poetic Tributes to Toussaint Louverture from William Wordsworth (1803) to John Agard (2006)

Abstract: This survey of poetic tributes to Toussaint Louverture shows considerable differences in how the Haitian hero is commemorated in different cultural contexts. William Wordsworth celebrates him as a freedom fighter spearheading a transnational struggle against social inequities. American abolitionist John Greenleaf Whittier views Louverture as a "martyr" who exposes White supremacy. In *Champions of Freedom* (1910), Henrietta Cordelia Ray hails Louverture as a "patriot" inspiring a pan-African community. Ntozake Shange's choreopoem *For colored girls who have considered suicide when the rainbow is enuf* [sic] (1975) casts "Toussaint" as an imaginary friend helping the speaker find her first teenage love. In *Toussaint L'Ouverture Acknowledges Wordsworth's Sonnet "To Toussaint L'Ouverture"* (2006), John Agard cleverly comments on Western mythologizations of the Haitian hero. Collectively, these tributes not only reveal contrasting popular historiographies of Louverture, but also showcase different ways in which Black heroes are conceptualized from the Romantic period to the early twenty-first century.

Keywords: Toussaint Louverture, William Wordsworth, John Greenleaf Whittier, Henrietta Cordelia Ray, Ntozake Shange, John Agard

Introduction

The Haitian general François-Dominique Toussaint Louverture (1743-1803), also known as Toussaint L'Ouverture and Toussaint Bréda,[3] played a key role in the island's struggle for independence, and in the fight for abolition in the Western Hemisphere. Despite his singular importance, Louverture has remained a relatively obscure presence in popular culture, especially in the United States, where he remains little known outside the Black community (Bell 3). At the same time, a series of tributes from the Romantic period to the present show a sustained interest in the Haitian leader by poets recognizing Louverture as a catalyst shaping the course of Haitian history and freedom struggles in the Americas and beyond.

The poems surveyed here focus on different aspects of Louverture's personality and achievements. While William Wordsworth (1770-1850) sees him as a martyr in the battle against the French colonial empire, American abolitionist John Greenleaf Whittier (1807-1892) casts him as a stoic manumitted slave whose nobility of spirit elevates him above his vengeful, brutish peers. African-American poet Henrietta Cordelia Ray (1852-1916) views Louverture as a trailblazer for Civil Rights in the Americas, while Black feminist Ntozake Shange (1948-2018) views him as a forgotten icon representing the erasure of Blackness within the Western canon. Afro-Guyanese poet John Agard (born 1949) in his postmodern "Toussaint L'Ouverture Acknowledges Wordsworth's Sonnet 'To Toussaint L'Ouverture'" reclaims Louverture's voice by imagining him in conversation with the Romantic Lake District poet, lending him agency while highlighting the need to recover Black voices in Western historiography.

Collectively, these tributes attest to the continuity of Louverture's presence in anglophone literature, and to the malleability of his myth across the ages. Comparing and contrasting these various poetic responses in terms of language and form not only offers valuable insight into the changeable image of

[3] Although Louverture modeled his adopted surname on the French expression *l'ouverture* (an opening), he never spelled his name with an apostrophe (Bell 56). I am following modern historiography in spelling his name accordingly.

Louverture, but also reveals larger trends within cultural representations of Black heroes from Romanticism to the present.

Whitewashing Louverture: William Wordsworth's Europeanized Freedom Fighter (1802)

William Wordsworth's sonnet "To Toussaint L'Ouverture," published in the *Morning Post* on February 2, 1803, and reprinted in a revised version in the *Sonnets Dedicated to Liberty* (1807), represents the earliest known poetic tribute to the Haitian general in the English language. Written in late August 1802 shortly after news of Louverture's imprisonment at the Fort-de-Joux near Besançon (France) reached England (Woof 184), the poem idolizes Toussaint as a fallen military hero whose uncompromising battle against the French proves him one of England's most loyal allies. Appearing two months before Louverture passed away on April 7 due to the inhumane conditions at Fort-de-Joux (Bell 284), the poem is written as a direct address to the Haitian leader languishing in his prison cell anticipating his impending death:

> TO TOUSSAINT L'OUVERTURE
>
> TOUSSAINT! the most unhappy of men,
> Whether the rural milk-maid by her cow
> Sing in thy hearing, or thou liest now
> Alone in some deep dungeon's earless den,
> O miserable Chieftain! where and when
> Wilt thou find patience? yet die not, be thou
> Life to thyself in death; with che[e]rful brow
> Live, loving death, not let one thought in ten
>
> Be painful to thee. Thou hast left behind
> Powers that will work for thee, air, earth, and skies,
> There's not a breathing of the common wind
> That will forget thee: thou hast great allies:
> Thy friends are exultations, agonies,
> And love, and man's unconquerable mind.
> (*The Morning Post* 2)

By deploying powerful emotive language with "Miltonic" overtones (McNulty 750), the sonnet eulogizes Louverture as a hero whose downfall is of huge significance to communities in Europe and beyond. The capitalized title ("TO TOUSSAINT L'OUVERTURE") is followed by an equally emphatic salutation, whose iambic stress pattern ("TOUS-SAINT!") hints at the leader's saintliness and his role in saving 'all' (*tous* in French) from oppression.[4] The speaker sustains his celebration of Louverture through an oscillating between direct address ("yet die not") and outward description ("the most unhappy of men"), thereby energizing the poem, and underscoring the weightiness of the tragedy unfolding.

Significantly, the sonnet avoids unambiguous ethnic markers in the characterization of Louverture. Whitewashed and Europeanized, he emerges as a generic Western freedom fighter whose enmity to France eclipses any perceived ethnic or cultural difference vis-à-vis an English reader. This erasure of Louverture's difference is echoed in other contemporary celebrations of the Haitian general, such as James

[4] Etymological echoes in Wordsworth's opener seem plausible given the various accidental and deliberate misspellings of the Haitian's name in the English press, such as a reference to the general as "POUSSAINT L'OUVERTURE" (literally 'powerful Louverture') in the *Times of London* on November 7, 1794 in an obvious attempt to cheer the valor in his fight against the French (Pierrot 582). (sic)

Stephen's biography *Buonaparte in the West Indies; or the History of Toussaint Louverture, the African Hero* (1803) published in the same year, which downplays Louverture's denomination, saying that "he was a Roman Catholic, it is true, but he knew no better faith" (Pierrot 589). In visual portraits, Louverture customarily differs from regular Black Haitians and appears more Westernized and cultivated than the brutish Black stereotypical figures he is surrounded by, resembling a blend between "the regal military officer and the heroic black chief" (Pierrot 595). Wordsworth aims for a similar hybridity in the epithet "O miserable Chieftain," which not only evokes associations with tribal stereotypes but also Scottish culture, which Wordsworth celebrated in other poems written in the same year, such as "To a Highland Girl" (Dorothy Wordsworth 113-15).

Wordsworth's Westernized Louverture blends seamlessly with the pastoral figures in the poem: the "rural milk-maid by her cow / Sing[ing] in [his] hearing" in the original version, and the "whistling Rustic tend[ing] his plow" replacing the milkmaid in the *Sonnets Dedicated to Liberty*. Enveloped by bucolic harmony, Louverture is not only Whitewashed and Europeanized but also deracinated and depoliticized. Withering in his "earless den," he is asked to "find patience" and "live, loving death" with "che[e]rful brow," without "one thought in ten" that is "painful to [him]."

Associations with the Haitian revolution and abolition are submerged in a European pastoral landscape, whose pantheistic "[powers]" of "air, earth, and skies" become Louverture's only legacy. While the lines "[t]here's not a breathing of the common wind / That will forget thee" may admittedly be read as denoting a broader struggle against disenfranchised demographics in Europe and the Americas, the cheerful mien of milkmaid and rustic, compounded by the absence of distinct political and socio-economic contexts, questions such a reading, and suggests that Wordsworth's poem primarily serves to discredit the French empire rather than promoting social reform, let alone abolition in the British colonies.

Contextual clues from *The Morning Post* confirm the sonnet's reactionary subtext. Printed on the same page we find a centrally placed news item telling of England's French Ambassador "contract[ing] with British Merchants for a large quantity of shipping [...] to convey French troops and stores to St. Domingo [i.e. Haiti]." Rather than dismissing the scheme as unjust and unpatriotic, the editorial comments on the design in a striking non-committal tone, stating that

> [o]n this subject two opinions are held. All those who are not West-India Proprietors disapprove of assisting the French in regaining St. Domingo; all those who are Proprietors zealously contend for giving them every aid. They [the Proprietors] wish to live under the British Government rather than the French, but they would prefer the French to the dominion of the Blacks. This may be [a] good argument in Jamaica, but it is most pernicious reasoning in London. If once our Colonial subjects are allowed to calculate the prudence of their allegiance, there is an end of our Colonial Empire. (*The Morning Post* 2)

The cold *realpolitik* informing the deliberations by planters ("Proprietors") and editors alike shows a complete disregard for Haiti's liberated slaves, who are reduced to a negligible cipher ("the Blacks"), and possibly perceived as a threat. The marginalizing and demonizing of Blackness expressed in this news story is echoed in Wordsworth's erasure of Louverture's ethnicity and color. As a depoliticized text, Wordsworth's sonnet is clustered with similarly non-controversial items in a gossip column featuring betting odds, reports on a card party for the Queen, praise for a Galvanic experiment at the "Lord Mayor's *Feast*," and a listing of recent honorary titles issued by the King.

Wordsworth's poem, then, fits the mold of *The Morning Post*, much like its sequel "The Banished Negroes" printed nine days later (Woof 185), which expresses outrage at the treatment of Blacks by France while staying silent on British racial politics (Curtis 145). Unlike Samuel T. Coleridge's *Recantation: An Ode* (1798), which was censored by *The Morning Post* for its overt reference to the British slave trade (Paul-

Emile 61-62), Wordsworth's eulogy shows no trace of the poet attempting to ruffle readers or challenge dominant social norms through his publication.

Wordsworth's revised version in the *Sonnets Dedicated to Liberty* is even more reactionary than the original, with the image of Louverture's "head [...] / *Pillowed* in some deep dungeon's earless den" (37, emphasis added) bizarrely camouflaging his physical suffering at Fort-de-Joux. Penned after Louverture's death, the poem asks the Haitian leader and the reader to quietly accept his downfall ("Though fallen thyself, never to rise again, / Live, and take comfort" (37) rather than protest this social injustice. A similar acquiescence pervades the *Sonnets Dedicated to Liberty* as a whole, which eulogize independent European territories lost to France, such as Switzerland (39) or Venice (36), while eclipsing the curtailing of social liberties by these very territories. Indeed, colonial ambition is openly celebrated in "On the Extinction of the Venetian Republic," which mourns the demise of the Venetian colonial empire: "Once did She hold the gorgeous east in fee" (36). In a similar vein, Wordsworth's praise for Louverture seeks to elevate his significance for the battle against the French while eclipsing his contribution to liberating Haiti's slaves, assuming a reactionary position that mirrors Wordworth's journey towards increasingly conservative views throughout his life.

Stereotyping Louverture: John Greenleaf's Abolitionist Icon (1833)

If "To Toussaint L'Ouverture" was ever intended as a controversial statement, Wordsworth himself seems to have forgotten all about it by the 1830s, when he writes to the owner of *The Morning Post*, Daniel Stuart: "I am quite certain that nothing of mine ever appeared in the *Morning Post*, except a very, very, few sonnets upon political subjects, and one Poem called the 'Farmer of Tilsbury Vale,' but whether this appeared in the *Morning Post* or the *Courier*, I do not remember" (Woof 149).

The insignificance Wordsworth attributes to his 'political' poems (including "To Toussaint L'Ouverture") contrasts with the overt political intent of another tribute to Louverture from the 1830s by the American abolitionist John Greenleaf Whittier, who made the Haitian general the protagonist of one of his anti-slavery poems. Whittier's ballad, first published in the literary monthly *New England Magazine* in November 1833 (Jarvis 175) and reprinted in the Boston-based abolitionist newspaper *The Liberator* in June 1837 (Williams 251), breaks with the conventions of contemporary abolitionist poetry by situating its narrative not in the United States but on foreign soil (Braga 588). Whittier seems to have been directly inspired by Wordsworth, whose sonnet is attached to the 1892 edition of his text and faintly echoed in several lines. Whittier also drew inspiration from the Romantic political philosopher William Godwin, according to whom "the West India Islands, since their first discovery by Columbus, could not boast of a single name which deserves comparison with that of Toussaint L'Ouverture" (Whittier 1892).

The praise Whittier heaps on Louverture contrasts with language that portrays him as servile and fiercely loyal towards his former masters. At the outbreak of the Haitian revolution, Louverture allegedly "refused to join [the rebels] until he had aided M[onsieur] Bayou [his former master] and his family to escape to Baltimore" (Whittier 1892). Louverture's "preservation of [Bayou's] life" is said to have been out of "gratitude" for receiving from his master "the first branches of education." Louverture's heroic status, then, emerges as a by-product of his previous enslaved status, since it was only because "[t]he white man had discovered in Toussaint many noble qualities" that Toussaint received the education necessary for rising above the "brut[ish]" (28) and "savage" (46) inhabitants on the island.

Toussaint's magnanimity toward the White planters is also the prime quality that renders him heroic in Whittier's poem. Unlike other nameless "toiling negro[es] [...] fe[eding] the weary-turning [sugar] mill" (32–35) who lust for "vengeance bitterer than [their] wrong" (47), Louverture exercises perfect self-restraint, and stands silently by, while "injured Afric" (95) collectively rises against its former enslavers:

> Why strikes he not, the foremost one,
> Where murder's sternest deeds are done?
> He stood the aged palms beneath,
> That shadowed o'er his humble door,
> Listening, with half-suspended breath,
> To the wild sounds of fear and death,
> Toussaint L'Ouverture!
> (Whittier 1892:105-17)

The differentiating of Louverture from the "wild sounds" overwhelming the island is echoed in racialized descriptions that show him overcoming innate traits of savagery through religiously inspired stoicism. Hearing the voices of "fierce" warriors from afar, he "smile[s] grimly o'er his brown of night" (123), as if to distance himself from his fellow Haitians. A "dark-souled chieftain" who has seen "the light / Of mild Religion's heavenly ray" (128-29), he inhabits the nobility of Wordsworth's deracinated, Westernized chieftain in the guise of an exotic figure who has overcome the power of his ethnic roots. His promotion to the rank of a savior figure above his Haitian peers is also powerfully captured in lines that cast him as a Christ figure suffering among common criminals on Golgotha, having chosen "[t]he lowlier and the purer way, / In which the Holy Sufferer trod, / Meekly amidst the sons of crime[.]" (Whittier 1892:131-33).

Following an extensive build-up that contrasts native vengeance with Louverture's stoicism, the ballad culminates in a climax where Louverture sacrifices himself to save a colored damsel from the bullet of a vengeful slave owner. Seeing "[t]he white man" preparing to shoot "[t]he sweetest flower of all the isle" along with her child, Louverture intervenes, signposted through an impassioned speech urging her to "fly with [him]" just as "the dark insurgent train" of Haitians sweeps

> headlong, through the crackling cane,
> [...]
> Drunken and grim, with shout and yell
> Howl[ing] through the dark, like sounds from hell.
> (Whittier 1892:198-201)

In a rushed resolution, the speaker transports Louverture to his "dungeon-tomb" at Besançon, where the "Dark Haytien" is urged to "sleep calmly" until

> [his] name shall be
> Redeemed from color's infamy
> And men shall learn to speak of [him]
> As one of earth's great spirits
> [...]
> [...] [and of] strong majesty of soul
> Which knows no color, tongue, or clime[.]
> (Whittier 1892:218-26)

Whittier's equivocating on Louverture's color, bringing "infamy" yet also signifying "strong majesty of soul," aptly summarizes the poem's conflicted racial politics. Heroic Louverture abstains from joining the Black mob inflicting rough justice on former slave owners. His self-sacrifice for a Black damsel further ennobles him, and contrasts him with Black sexual predators threatening White women earlier on in the ballad:

> And on the night-air, wild and clear,

Rose woman's shrike of more than fear;
For bloodied arms were round her thrown,
And dark cheeks pressed against her own!
(Whittier 1892:91-94)

Whittier thus celebrates Toussaint as heroic for his compatibility with racialized codes that assign liberated Blacks humility and forgiveness, even when coming face to face with their former tormentors. That Whittier, whose abolitionist credentials are well-documented (Jarvis 162), should embrace such demeaning racial archetypes so fully might seem surprising to a modern reader, yet would not have been unusual for abolitionists at the time, who often deployed racial anthropology and demeaning archetypes to further their cause. Though hardly heroic to a modern reader, Whittier's Louverture embodies a stoicism and magnanimity that abolitionist writers frequently promoted to represent manumitted slaves as docile and non-threatening.

Ethnicizing Louverture: Henrietta Cordelia Ray's Hero Civil Rights Activist (1910)

One century after Wordsworth's tribute, the African-American schoolteacher-turned-writer Henrietta Cordelia Ray penned her own sonnet informed by the Lake District poet's. Emulating Wordsworth in form and tone, Ray celebrates Toussaint in archaic language as a hero for his "race":

To those fair isles where crimson sunsets burn,
We send a backward glance to gaze on thee,
Brave Toussaint! thou was surely born to be
A hero; thy proud spirit could but spurn
Each outrage on the race. Couldst thou unlearn
The lessons taught by instinct? Nay! and we
Who share the zeal that would make all men free,
Must e'en with pride unto thy life-work turn.

Soul-dignity was thine and purest aim;
And ah! how sad that thou wast left to mourn
In chains 'neath alien skies. On him, shame! shame!
That mighty conqueror who dared to claim
The right to bind thee. Him we heap with scorn,
And noble patriot! guard with love thy name.
(Ray 88)

While archaic phrases ("To those fair isles," "Couldst thou unlearn") credit Wordsworth as an inspiration, Ray's elegy constructs a public voice ("We") that acts as a spokesperson for the Black community. Smooth enjambement (as in "thou was surely born to be / A hero") lends the poem fluidity, with emphatic apostrophe ("Brave Toussaint!") and interjections ("On him [Napoleon], shame! shame!") lending the poem a conversational element. Like in Wordsworth's sonnet, the poetic voice mediates between Louverture and the audience. In addition, the Haitian general is also contextualized as the victim of "[t]hat mighty conqueror who dared to claim / The right to bind thee," acknowledging the colonial and political dimensions responsible for Louverture's death.

The heroic qualities Ray celebrates in Louverture—his courage ("Brave Toussaint!"), self-respect ("proud spirit"), integrity ("[s]oul-dignity"), and love of freedom ("mak[ing] all men free")—fashion him into an icon for a wider Black community. In several instances Ray tweaks elements of Wordsworth's sonnet, turning a generic elegy for a deracinated freedom fighter into a plea for social change. Ray's

rewriting of Wordsworth becomes particularly palpable in the opening, where Wordsworth's generic apostrophe "TOUSSAINT!" is replaced with an exposition establishing time and place. Louverture is rooted in the Caribbean ("those fair isles where crimson sunsets burn") and inhabits a past accessible through the speaker's narrative ("[w]e send a backward glance to gaze on thee"). The "backward glance" at Louverture asserts a personal connection based on common values ("we / [...] share the zeal that would make all men free"), with the speaker thanking the Haitian leader for his pioneering "life-work." The poem also highlights the corrosive effects of Louverture's displacement by describing how he suffered "in chains 'neath *alien* skies" (emphasis added), thus effectively replacing Wordsworth's Eurocentric perspective with a foregrounding of Louverture's forced deportation. As a Haitian displaced to Europe, Louverture is the antithesis of Wordsworth's Europeanized freedom fighter: he is a "noble patriot" protesting "outrage[s] on the race."

Another rewriting of Wordsworth occurs in the final lines, where Wordsworth's calm acceptance of Louverture's downfall ("thou hast great allies; / Thy friends are exultations, agonies, / And love") gives way to an explicit acknowledgment of his suffering: "And ah! how sad that thou wast left to mourn / In chains." Ray's speaker protests the injustices of Louverture's incarceration at the behest of Napoleon ("On him, shame! shame!"), and asserts the significance of Louverture's legacy ("guard with love thy name"). The concreteness of Ray's vision recalibrates Louverture as a hero whose sufferings can be meaningfully contextualized and historicized.

By contrasting Louverture with 'shameful' Napoleon, the text also challenges the Western marginalization of Black voices. As an icon who is unmarked (rather than alien), honorable (contrasting with Napoleon's shame), and loyal to his principles (unable to "unlearn / The lessons taught by instinct"), Louverture occupies a heroic status that legitimizes his inclusion among Ray's *Champions of Freedom*. Ray's sonnet thus effectively reframes Louverture as an inspirational icon for a wider Black community. By celebrating Louverture as one "[w]ho share[s] the zeal that would make all men free," she stresses the importance of remembering the legacy of Black pioneers in the fight for social justice.

Loving Louverture: Ntozake Shange's Romantic Hero (1975)

A radically new appreciation of Louverture appeared in the 1970s in the shape of a choreopoem, a new form crafted by Ntozake Shange, which combined poetry, dance, music, and song to convey the experience of minority women. In her choreopoem *For colored girls who have considered suicide when the rainbow is enuf* (performed 1975, printed 1977), Shange humorously explores the significance of Louverture as a cultural icon for the African-American community, using comedy to humanize the mythical figure.

In a vignette stretching over two hundred lines, an anonymous "lady in brown" shares a surreal anecdote of how she reportedly fell in love with the historical figure of "TOUSSAINT" while poring over his narrative in the adult section of a library:

> de library waz right down from de trolly tracks
> cross from de laundry-mat
> thru de big shinin floors & granite pillars
> ol st. louis is famous for
> i found toussaint
> but not til after months uv
> cajun katie/ pippi longstockin
> christopher robin/ eddie heyward & a pooh bear
> in the children's room
> only pioneer girls & magic rabbits

& big city white boys
i knew i waznt sposedta
but i ran inta the ADULT READING ROOM
& came across

TOUSSAINT

my first blk man
(i never counted george washington carver
cuz i didnt like peanuts)

The humorously extended discovery of "TOUSSAINT" by the enamored young reader contains various class markers that reflect the speaker's intersectional status. Tucked away in a stately library whose "big shinin floors & granite pillars" contrast with the "trolly tracks" and "laundry-mat" she is accustomed to, Louverture's seems purposely hidden from the young reader. Only after piling through uneventful "months uv / cajun katie / pippi longstockin / christopher robin / eddie heyward & a pooh bear" does she finally gain access to "TOUSSAINT / my first blk man," whose place in the "ADULT READING ROOM" turns him into an object of forbidden desire.

Louverture's aura is further developed through his iconoclastic stance toward White culture:

TOUSSAINT waz a blk man a negro like my mama say
who refused to be a slave
& he spoke french
& didnt low no white man to tell him nothin
not napolean
not maximillien
not robespierre
TOUSSAINT L'OUVERTURE
waz the beginnin uv reality for me
in the summer contest for
who colored child can read
15 books in three weeks
i won & raved abt TOUSSAINT L'OUVERTURE
at the afternoon ceremony
waz disqualified
cuz Toussaint
belonged in the ADULT READING ROOM

Conveyed through a vernacular that breaks with normative sociolects at every turn, the speaker mimics Louverture's rebellious spirit linguistically, which establishes a sense of camaraderie between the two. As collaborators taking on White-dominated social order, speaker and TOUSSAINT emerge as modern-day alter egos: voices that agree on not "[al]low[ing] no white man to tell [one] nothin." The speaker remembers her imaginary relationship to her construct of Louverture as a defining turning point, "the beginnin uv reality," which lends her awareness of her socio-economic contexts. In "the summer contest for / who [sic] colored child can read / 15 books in three weeks," Toussaint acts as a faithful ally in the speaker's battle against a system whose patronizing literacy program stigmatizes a disadvantaged Black community through the discriminatory language it uses. The choreopoem's tragi-comic twist—being disqualified "cuz Toussaint / belonged in the ADULT READING ROOM"—asserts the harmfulness of a

Eurocentric, infantile canon that curtails the young Black protagonist's journey from childhood to adolescence, stultifying her personal and academic growth.

The poem takes another comic twist with "TOUSSAINT" becoming the speaker's "secret lover at the age of 8":

> i entertained him in my bedroom
> widda flashlight under my covers
> way inta the night/ we discussed strategies
> how to remove white girls from my hopscotch games
> & etc.

The comically overstated revenge plots hatched by Louverture and the speaker highlight her volatile status as a young girl eager to

> run away from my
> integrated home
> integrated street
> integrated school

She struggles to cope with the pressures of attending a mixed school, confessing: "1955 waz not a good year for lil blk girls." In the ensuing part of the poem, the speaker's fantasy of escaping with "Toussaint" is comically realized as she elopes with a boy named Toussaint, whose confession that his full name is "TOUSSAINT JONES" in no way lessens his appeal to the protagonist seeking a new life beyond White-dominated social codes.

By reimagining Louverture as a defining presence in a young Black girl's life—as an inspirational forbidden text, an out-of-reach idol, a heroic Black leader rediscovered in an actual lover—Louverture is directly associated with the "love" Wordsworth's and Ray's sonnets express for the Haitian leader. By literalizing the love to Louverture, and turning him into an imaginary lover, Shange cleverly pokes fun at the corrosive effect of fossilized Western canons, the erasure of Black figures within said canons, and the challenges faced by young Black women struggling to be heard.

Re-membering Louverture: John Agard's Loquacious Leader (2006)

Afro-Guyanese poet John Agard revisits the myth of Toussaint Louverture in a similarly humorous manner, balancing social critique with comedy to bring his subject matter alive. Mimicking numerous Black and diasporic speakers from other Agard poems, Louverture's voice is cheeky and direct, foregrounding the structural injustices underpinned by cultural codes of exclusion. Much like the speaker from "Listen Mr. Oxford Don," who introduces himself with "me a simple immigrant / from Clapham Common / I didn't graduate / I immigrate," Louverture speaks of himself in terms of absence, as un-English and un-Wordsworthian:

> I have never walked on Westminster Bridge
> or had a close-up view of daffodils.
> My childhood's roots are the Haitian hills
> where runaway slaves made a freedom pledge
>
> and scarlet poincianas flaunt their scent.
> I have never walked on Westminster Bridge
> or speak, like you, with Cumbrian accent.

> My tongue bridges Europe to Dahomey.
> (Agard 35)

In a humorous dig at Wordsworth's iconicity, the speaker's frank admission of having neither "walked on Westminster Bridge" nor seen any "daffodils" de-mythologizes localities associated with Romanticism (the Lake District, London) while asserting the status and significance of his roots: "the Haitian hills / where runaway slaves make a freedom pledge." The unexpected pairing of emblems of canonicity (Westminster Bridge, daffodils) with symbols of marginalization (Haitian hills, scarlet poincianas) marks the speaker as an archetypal diasporic voice. By connecting place, childhood, natural surroundings, and sensory perception in a chronotope associated with liberty, Haiti emerges as an identity-shaping place that roots Louverture while at the same time rivaling Wordsworth's Lake District as the spatiality associated with independence and liberty. Louverture's voice, too, is contrasted with Wordsworth's: he does not "speak [...] with Cumbrian accent" but in a "tongue [that] bridges Europe to Dahomey," embracing a hybridity which Agard's narrators (in other poems like "Half-caste") take pride in.

Toussaint's hybrid identity—linked to the Black Atlantic demarked through Dahomey (West Africa), Haiti, and London—is linked to the quest for liberty: the "freedom pledge" made by "runaway slaves" headed by the Haitian general. This concern with liberty is further explored in the sestet, and revealed as the defining concept that allows for the successful bridging of a cultural, political, economic, and social gulf dividing Europe (represented through Wordsworth's voice) and the African diaspora (personified in Toussaint's):

> Yet how sweet is the smell of liberty
> when human beings share a common garment.
> So, thanks brother, for your sonnet's tribute.
> May it resound when the Thames' text stays mute.
> And what better ground than a city's bridge
> for my unchained ghost to trumpet love's decree.
> (Agard 35)

Metaphors of sameness and community bridge the contrasts articulated in the octet, in which Louverture acknowledges Wordsworth as his "brother," and thanks him for his "sonnet's tribute" in simple, direct language, typical of the way Agard's narrators cut through layers of etiquette and approach people of distinction as mere humans rather than cultural icons. This moment of recognition and respect is paralleled by imagery connoting union and togetherness: "human beings shar[ing] a common garment" and "a city's bridge," now generic rather than Westminster Bridge, thus offering a perfect locale for the coming together of the two voices.

This sense of unity is, however, undercut by disturbing notes in the last three lines, where the "mute[ness]" of "the Thames" suggests erasure, silencing, and canceling of the English or Western canon, though perhaps also of Louverture's voice. Louverture's reference to his "unchained ghost" evokes the violent end inflicted on his historical alter ego, while also introducing an idea of his physicality being liberated through his voice: a metaphor that echoes Wordsworth's idea of Louverture's voice being sublimated and immortalized through death, being at one in nature. The final plea to "trumpet love's decree" likewise asserts the importance of sameness over difference, and of unity over division, ending the poem on a poignant yet conciliatory note. Devoid of any bitterness of the pain inflicted, Agard's Louverture embraces Wordsworth and the reader with open arms, telling his story to gain understanding and sympathy and to take one step towards a future where "the smell of liberty" is shared and enjoyed across communities at large.

Conclusions

The poems surveyed here reveal Toussaint Louverture as a malleable mythical figure who is continually rewritten across the ages. A close reading of these poems also shows poets refashioning Louverture based on preconceived cultural ideals. Wordsworth's Louverture uncannily resembles the European freedom fighter celebrated in other *Sonnets of Liberty*, Whittier's Louverture matches the abolitionist stereotype of a manumitted slave respecting his former master without holding any grudges, while Henrietta Cordelia Ray acknowledges him as a Black pioneer furthering Black communities worldwide.

The last two poems discussed here, by Ntozake Shange and John Agard, offer quirky and surprisingly personal tributes to the Haitian hero. Engaging the reader in playful postmodern comedy, these texts call for an appreciation of Louverture in a freer form, beyond staid formulaic conventions. Loving Louverture (Shange) and appropriating Louverture's voice (Agard) become ways of reconnecting to a historical icon, whose contributions to Haitian and global history justly lend him heroic status.

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Author

Lorenz A. HINDRICHSEN is a literary historian working on English writing from the late medieval to the modern period with a particular focus on gender and race, pandemic literature, trauma theory, and the graphic novel. He has published book chapters with Routledge, Springer, Winter, and contributed papers to *Essays in Medieval Studies*, *Refractions*, and *Closure*. Lorenz studied at Zurich and Aberdeen University, writing his MA thesis on social codes in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, and his PhD on non-Western figures in Shakespeare and Renaissance art. Lorenz teaches English and Theory of Knowledge at Copenhagen International School.

Contact: lorenz.hindrichsen@cis.dk

Sun Hee Teresa Lee
Gustavus Adolphus College in Minnesota, USA

From the Private to the Public: Latinx Bilingual Subject Formation in Richard Rodriguez's *Hunger of Memory* and Julia Alvarez's *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents*

Abstract: This article brings together two established texts in the U.S. Latinx literary canon, Richard Rodriguez's memoir *Hunger of Memory* (1982) and Julia Alvarez's novel *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents* (1991), to investigate the startlingly similar ways the authors frame their stories of Americanization through language. From their respective Mexican American and Dominican American positions, Rodriguez and Alvarez explore the process of mastering English as a requirement for acquiring an American identity. While Rodriguez and the Garcia sisters ultimately succeed, Spanish and English do not coexist harmoniously in their lives; rather, their first language inscribed by the private sphere and their adopted language inscribed by the public grate against each other in unsettling ways. Americanization necessitates a move from the (other) first language to the (same) English language, which is shown to be a fraught enterprise for bilingual individuals. This study applies Louis Althusser's theory of interpellation to situate language at the site of subject-formation and W.E.B. Du Bois's concept of double-consciousness to define U.S. minoritarian identity along public and private lines. I also draw from the postcolonial history of the Americas and socio-linguistic studies of U.S. bilingualism.

Keywords: multilingual, bilingual, interpellation, subject formation, ethnic identity

Introduction

Richard Rodriguez's *Hunger of Memory* (1982) and Julia Alvarez's *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents* (1991) bear a startling resemblance in telling a story of Americanization through language. Their overt differences in genre and cultural location notwithstanding—Rodriguez's book is a memoir written by a second generation Mexican American, and Alvarez's book is a novel featuring the Garcia sisters, so-called 1.5 generation Dominican Americans—Rodriguez and the Garcia sisters share an experience of linguistic travel from their Spanish mother tongue to the dominant U.S. English. Although these two texts have not yet been paired in focused scholarship, they offer an interesting comparative case in Latinx literary studies; they present a similar view into the process of bilingual subject formation in the United States.

As a canonical text in Mexican American literature, *Hunger of Memory* has a rich, albeit controversial, critical history. The issue of language, in particular, was initially subsumed by critics' reactions to Rodriguez's argument against bilingual education, his endorsement of assimilation as a key to success for Mexican Americans, and his dismissive attitude toward the Chicano Movement.[5] The influential critic Ramón Saldivar and the respected writer Thomás Rivera, among others, openly opposed these stances and shaped much of the critical discourse around Rodriguez's memoir, especially in the first two decades

[5] Rodriguez's stance is clear in the following statement about bilingual education, that it "simplistically scorn[s] the value and necessity of assimilation" and "the achievement of *public* individuality" (26) (emphasis original). His dismissal of the Chicano Movement is reflected in the following statement: "Aztec ruins hold no special interest for me" (3).

after its publication.[6] While the discussion of the politics of *Hunger of Memory* is certainly important, one of the issues that has been overlooked as a result is the nuanced ways in which multilinguality functions in the book. For example, the reader can see that Rodriguez's assimilation through English is undermined by his constant "remember[ing of] what was so grievously lost" (5), the world of Spanish.[7] Twenty-first century critics have begun to unpack the nuanced issue of language and bilinguality more directly. Eduardo de Gregorio connects Rodriguez's strategic use of Spanish and English to gender construction, and Jeehyun Lim analyzes bilinguality as the core of Rodriguez's complicated sense of identity.[8] This article similarly examines the intricate workings of language in the book by examining the topic of bilingual individual's subject formation in the U.S context.

Free from the type of controversy that surrounds Rodriguez's *Hunger of Memory,* critics of Alvarez's *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents* have written more directly about language since the novel's publication. For instance, both Joan Hoffman and Julie Barak map the characters' linguistic struggles onto their search for stable identities. Hoffman argues that the characters are empowered through English language learning and mastery. Through a Bakhtinian reading of the novel, Barak charts a similar identity struggle around language where bilinguality signals a split in identity, which mastery of English can mitigate. While both Barak and Hoffman see a constructive side to the linguistic struggles in the novel, Ricardo Castells argues that the four sisters ultimately fail to establish a stable identity, because the linguistic demands of the United States continually make them feel alienated.[9] Similarly, Allison Harris contends in her psychoanalytic study that the character "Yolanda's psycho-linguistic breakdown firmly signifies the failure of hybridity" (1). My argument falls between these camps. I intentionally do not plot my argument on the success-failure spectrum, as such a discourse often locates the problem in the individual, whether material or psychic. Instead, I examine the social and historical contexts of the Spanish-English language question in the U.S. and their influence on the individual and argue that a bilingual subject's Americanization is structurally and experientially ambivalent.

My analysis zeroes in on the formative moments of the native Spanish speakers Carla in *Garcia Girls* and Richard in *Hunger of Memory* entering the terrain of ideologically English-only U.S. state. Both Carla and Rodriguez learn and eventually master the English language, but Spanish and English do not coexist harmoniously in their lives. Rather, their first language inscribed by the private sphere and their adopted

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[6] Saldivar unleashed one of the most biting criticisms against Rodriguez in his article "Chicano Autobiography: Ideologies of the Self," claiming that Rodriguez "chooses to market his existential anguish to the most receptive audience imaginable: the right wing and the liberal academic intelligentsia" and does "political service to the Right" (49). Thomás Rivera, less scathing but similarly critical, called Rodriguez's a "colonized mind" (9), clearly "a reflection of North American education" (10). For a useful overview of conflicting receptions of Rodriguez's book, see Fernando Pedro Delgado's "Richard Rodriguez and the Culture Wars: The Politics of (Mis)Representation," and for a discussion of recent developments in criticism of *Hunger of Memory* see Michael Garcia's "The Communally Derived Ethnic Self in Richard Rodriguez's *Hunger of Memory*" pages 72-75. See also Ramón Saldivar's overall assessment of Rodriguez's memoir in the context of Mexican American writings in his book *Chicano Narrative: The Dialectics of Difference*. Although Saldivar's argument about what an ethnic autobiography should and should not do has some validity, I am more interested in exploring what *Hunger of Memory* does do and why.

[7] Literary critics have begun to address directly this ambivalence of joy of assimilation and the feeling of loss at the center of the memoir. Many studies connect this doubleness to Rodriguez's gay and Catholic identities. See Newtown, Perry, Randy Rodriguez, and Walker.

[8] Lim points out "a continued struggle with linguistic otherness" in the text, even as Spanish might be a "forgotten language" for Rodriguez (519). She reads this ambivalence as an "(ironic) performance of bilingualism" (520).

[9] Costello writes: "repeatedly find[ing] themselves at odds with their bicultural surroundings, experiencing a form of alienation that is often symbolized by either silence or by an absolute failure to communicate with other characters" (34).

language inscribed by the public continue to grate against each other in unsettling ways. This linguistic contention clearly visible in the two texts speaks to the underlying linguistic basis of Americanization as a move from the (other) native language to the (same) English language. While both Rodriguez and Carla make this move, the move is not so clean—they cannot quite leave behind the world of Spanish—and thus wholeheartedly feeling American and unequivocally adopting the American culture are shown to be fraught enterprises for bilingual individuals. Drawing from theories of language, minoritarian identity, and postcolonialism, and historical and socio-linguistic studies on U.S. bilingualism, I argue that multilingual subjects carry this ambivalence even when they proceed externally toward and achieve successful Americanization. This incongruity between multilnguality and American identity that we see in Rodriguez's and Alvarez's books points to the power of monolingualism that undergirds U.S. culture and identity, even as U.S. has always been a multi-lingual nation.

Theory, History, and Methodology: Framing U.S. Spanish-English Bilingualism

One key thematic similarity between Rodriguez's and Alvarez's books is that Rodriguez and Carla see their private and public spheres as absolutely discrete. Much of their confusion about identity and the resultant anguish comes from this insistent sense of separate spheres. One way to understand this may be in the context of the development of a minority subject's consciousness in relation to the majority population.[10] While not often brought into discussions of bilingualism and identity, W.E.B. Du Bois's seminal text *The Souls of Blackfolk* (1903), where he famously identified "double-consciousness" at the core of the black psyche, nonetheless provides an invaluable grounding for this issue of separate spheres. In describing the first time he realizes his otherness, Du Bois writes: "Then it dawned upon me with a certain suddenness that I was different from the others; or like, mayhap, in heart and life and longing, but shut out from their world by a vast veil. I had thereafter no desire to tear down that veil, to creep through; I held all beyond it in common contempt, and lived above it in a region of blue sky and great wandering shadows" (2).

The metaphor of the veil, which Du Bois threads throughout his book, signifies a fissure that exists between his private sphere of "heart and life and longing" and the public space of the school and "their world." Once recognized, this fissure is part of his daily consciousness; through "contempt" and intentional avoidance he tries to overcome the veil, but it nevertheless remains a permanent feature of his being. As bilingual ethnic Americans, Rodriguez and Carla also have a kind of veil that separates their private world of Spanish and the public world of English. While they exist in both worlds, they cannot quite rend the veil in between.

While they eventually gain what I would term a double-lingual-consciousness, Rodriguez and Carla are initially pulled into the process of Americanization through English. Becoming an American is more than gaining a document of citizenship; it is adopting a set of ideologies associated with the U.S., and English is a pre-requisite. It follows the point by the linguist Claire Kramsch that the "modern nation as a cultural entity is… a utopia. It has been mirrored by a similar view of language as shared patrimony, a self-contained, autonomous, and homogeneous linguistic system based on a homogeneous social world—in other words, a linguistic utopia. Such imaginings are tenacious and contribute to what we call an individual's national 'identity'" (73). Although this "linguistic utopia" is a result of multi-layered "imaginings," the centrality of English to life in the U.S. is a material reality. At the official level of

[10] The terms "private" and "public" as well as their placement in binary oppositions have been the subject of much critical discussion around *Hunger of Memory*. Ramón Saldivar claims that the split construction of the private and the public shows that Rodriguez "fails to consider, as autobiography should, that the author lives, moves and has his being in historical projections which constitute him as a subject" (51). Bill Shuter interprets those terms in religious contexts. Michael Garcia understands private versus public construction as individual versus communal.

citizenship, English proficiency is required and even more so at the cultural level; lack of fluent English would immediately signal foreignness and illegitimacy as an American. Advocates for designating English as the official language of the U.S. or the only language of government have been around since the early days of the nation, with its most fervent recent period being the 1980s when several states, including California, adopted the English Language Amendment (Fishman 179). This goes to show, as Mary Louis Pratt points out, "English monolingualism operates in the US not as a policy but as a dogma, that is, a committed belief that is unresponsive to reality" (13).[11] English in these ways has become a key to an immigrant becoming a subject of the newly adopted nation of the U.S.

A theoretical text that astutely connects language to the ideologies of the state is Louis Althusser's well-known essay "Ideology and the State Apparatuses." The piece specifically lays out the process of an individual becoming a subject to ideology through language, a process he terms interpellation. According to his writing, "ideology 'acts' or 'functions' in such a way that it 'recruits' subjects among the individuals... or 'transforms' the individuals into subjects... by that very operation... called interpellation or hailing" (174). To illustrate this point concretely, Althusser gives the well-known analogy of a police calling out "Hey, you there!" as a beginning point of interpellation and argues that the moment the individual heeds to this call—more exactly when they turn to the police—is the moment when they are constituted as a subject. What is particularly interesting about this moment is the role of language: the police officer's utterance sparks the chain of actions that lead to the completion of the process of interpellation.

This language-based approach to subject formation seems fitting for a study of minority subjects whose native languages differ from the language of the dominant culture, the latter possessing the power to grant or to deny access into dominant society. However, what limits a straightforward application of Althusser's theory is suggested by the way his analogy plays out. When the police hails, Althusser writes, the individual "recognize[s]... that the hail was 'really' addressed to him, and that 'it was *really him* who was hailed' (and not someone else)" (174) (emphasis original). This is due to linguistic convention, he writes: "Experience shows that the practical telecommunication of hailings is such that they hardly ever miss their man; verbal call or whistle, the one hailed always recognizes that it is really him who is being hailed" (174). Althusser had discussed earlier in the essay the way that individuals accept their subjection as a given, which he claims is similar to the way we think of language. Because individuals do not question their subjection under ideology, the way they do not doubt the existence of language, they do not question the police's call; they simply turn and face the law.

This immediate understanding of what the call means presupposes a shared experience and more importantly, a shared language. Althusser assumes a monolingual context in which the speaker and the hearer do not hesitate in saying or hearing something. In her critical reassessment of Althusser's theory of interpellation in light of Etienne Balibar's work, Suzanne Gearhart similarly points out this assumption of a shared language, which she specifies as "a particular *national* language" (185) (emphasis original).[12] To say the least, this monolingual basis of the Althusserian model of subject formation poses a problem for individuals who navigate in multiple languages. What happens when a non-native speaker hears the call of the police in English? How would linguistic difference complicate Althusser's anecdote and more importantly the process of subjection he theorizes? If the ideology of the U.S. nation hails people through English, does a non-native speaker instinctively "turn" to the call, to ideology? If language is a key to interpellation, the necessary question that must be posed is "Which language?" In thus situating

[11] Pratt argues that this monolingual dogma has been established by Teddy Roosevelt who situated monolingualism in English "as the essential outward sign of loyalty" to the United States (15).

[12] She sees in this "seemingly innocent or neutral assumption… significant implications for his entire analysis of ideology," namely that he "ignores the role of the national language and thus of the nation itself in constructing subjectivity" (186).

Althusser's anecdote in a multi-lingual context, the assumption of perfect communication and unquestioned turn to ideology's call breaks down. While Althusser provides an important way to consider language's role in interpellation, it falls short of considering the ways in which multiple languages can alter the very process he lays out.[13]

This essay will apply Althusser's concept of interpellation to analyze how some non-native speakers of English become American subjects through language but also move beyond it to theorize bilingual subjects' identity formation. Rodriguez's *Hunger of Memory* and Alvarez's *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents* offer valuable insights into the process of subject formation in a multilingual U.S. context. While Rodriguez and the Garcia sisters are "hailed" in English by the symbolic representatives of the U.S. nation-state, their private (Spanish) and public (English) selves persist, albeit in distinct realms. Even as they "turn" to the hail of the ideology of American subjecthood, their private selves remain doggedly resistant. Following Althusser's scenario, rather than an immediate turning toward the police's hailing, there is a pause of sorts, a break in the natural chain of responses, created by a moment of linguistic uncertainty. I argue that this hesitation is a result of a bilingual subjectivity torn between private and public spheres, and it marks the ambivalence of a multilingual subject in relation to dominant ideologies of the U.S. nation-state represented in the call.[14] Even as they constitute as a subject, their subjection is always in trouble. Thus, interpellation occurs—individuals become Americans—but it is an imperfect interpellation: Spanish echoes through private spaces that interfere with the call of ideology in English.

In addition to Du Bois and Althusser, I draw upon postcolonial theory and socio-linguistic studies on bilingualism to inform my argument. Spanish in the United States harkens back to the colonial history of the Americas, in which the United States has been an active participant. The Mexican-American War leading up to the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo (1848), which established most of the present-day Southwest as U.S. land, not to mention military invasions and forced annexation of Texas, speak to the colonial history that undergirds the Spanish-English language question. Althusser's concept of interpellation has also been re-read in the context of colonialism, a recent example coming from Rey Chow's book *Not Like a Native Speaker: On Languaging as a Postcolonial Experience* (2014). Chow focuses on interpellation of colonized subjects in racialized and linguistic terms. Reading Althusser's police hailing scene alongside Franz Fanon's often discussed moment of interpellation through a racial slur, Chow sees in operation the double meaning of "tone" as both visual (skin tone) and aural (linguistic tone): "Operating at the border between shade and sound, the word underscores the irreducibility of language as a phenomenological actor, one whose ways of revealing what is at stake can be quite surprising and spot-on" (8). Finally, Socio-linguistics offers language- and place-specific studies tied to bilingual subject formation. For instance, Mercedes Niño-Marcia and Jason Rothman's collection *Bilingualism and Identity: Spanish at the Crossroads with Other Languages* abounds with case studies and insights that resonate with both Rodriguez's and Alvarez's stories. With this multidisciplinary grounding, but through the main vehicle of literary analysis, this essay discusses theories of subject formation, ethnic identity, and bilingualism, and demonstrates that literature, both fiction and non-fiction, enriches our understanding of the intricate and multiple ways in which languages and ideologies form the people of the United States.

[13] In the same vein Pratt critiques the monolingual basis of Ferdinand de Saussure's theories of modern linguistics. See p. 17.

[14] My argument in no way assumes a homogeneous experience of bilingual individuals in the United States. Bilingual subject formation depends on such multiple factors as history, region, class, age, education, family culture, and psychology. But in general, when individuals grow up in similar situations—a non-English mother tongue, pressure for English proficiency, cultural validation of English and devaluation of mother tongue—I believe they endure a similar process of subject formation that I trace in Rodriguez's and Alvarez's texts.

Hunger of Memory: The* [Lingual-Cultural] *Education of Richard Rodriguez

As I have discussed earlier, Rodriguez's emphasis on English proficiency as key to assimilation into U.S. society has received much criticism from Chicano critics and others. However, considering the historical context of Richard growing up in the 1950s United States, his position makes perfect sense.[15] Well before the Civil Rights Movement, this was a time when being both Mexican and American, and proudly bilingual, was not acceptable.[16] In the way Du Bois theorized two souls at war with each other, the American public reality of the time informed the separation of the private and public spheres of a non-white American, which meant that the two lingual-cultural worlds of Rodriguez could not coexist peacefully.[17]

While Rodriguez does not relate a single episode that brought him consciousness of his difference and gave him a sense of separate private and public spheres, sometime during his childhood he learned that his family was different from the majority of white people in their Sacramento neighborhood. There "were those two or three neighbors who tried initially to make… [them] unwelcome. ('Keep your brats away from my sidewalk!)" (11). This authorless exclamation is nestled within a parenthetical aside as if to suggest that one, this or something like this sentence is generic and therefore was probably heard quite often by the young Richard, and two, that while he would rather not recall being the target of such a directive, it still lives in his memory. Furthermore, the message is exclusionary and specifically about public territory. Of course, anyone claiming "my sidewalk" is wrongfully declaring ownership of public land. However, this use of the possessive does accurately point out that some do have more claim to the public sphere than others. And it is very clear to Richard that his parents are not one of them, as he writes, "the confidence of 'belonging' in public was withheld from them both" (10).

In addition to direct messages, Rodriguez learns to distinguish private and public spheres by audible subtleties; he was a "listening child, careful to hear the very different sounds of Spanish and English" (12). It is not just the difference in language but something more basic, difference in sound. Firstly, Rodriguez describes the sound of the English language in the following way:

> …there were English (*gringo*) sounds. So many words were still unknown that when the butcher or the lady at the drugstore said something to me, exotic polysyllabic sounds would bloom in the midst of their sentences. Often, the speech of people in public seemed to me very loud, booming with confidence. The man behind the counter would literally ask, 'What can I do for you?' But by being so firm and so clear the sound of his voice said that he was a *gringo*; he belonged in the public. (12) (emphasis original)

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[15] Even as Thomás Rivera criticizes *Hunger of* Memory, he writes that the book is a "personal expression, which one learns to respect for its sensibility" and should be "understood… in its singularity" (5). Emphasizing the personal even more, Bill Shuter calls *Hunger of Memory* a confessional and compares Rodriguez with Saint Augustine. Shuter also discusses the undercurrent of ambivalence in the text—"His narrative mocks the desire for a public identity that impels it" (97)—and frames Rodriguez's turning away from his family in terms of original sin (98).

[16] And even as recent as the 1990s, monolingualism maintains a strong hold in the U.S. In her excellent article on language in the works of Richard Rodriguez, Jeehyun Lim points out that many workplaces in that period adopted English-Only policies. She writes that this "shows how a binary view of public and private spheres provided the ground for a linguistic separation between the two spheres" and further contends, "English-Only workplaces thus were designed not simply to guarantee equal treatment at work, but to guard the public sphere against the invasion of a private sphere that included differences that were not recognized by public sphere norms" (522).

[17] I consider, as Fernando Pedro Delgado does, "Rodriguez's experiences to be real and representative of at least some Mexican-Americans" (14). Furthermore, I would argue that some level of assimilation occurs in all individuals living in a place where the dominant culture is different from their own. I do acknowledge, however, that Mexican American lingual experiences are multiple and individuals process multilinguality differently. See for example, Cristina Ros i Solé's "Autobiographical Accounts of L2 Identity Construction in Chicano Literature."

This is an especially interesting moment in Richard's development because he can understand some conversational English but not all. In that murky in-between stage of language and sound, we see his sense of public American culture being formed. English, the language of white people, is associated with confidence, firmness, clarity, and power—attributes that give them a rightful place in public American society. The sound of Rodriguez's private sphere, however, markedly differs from that of the public, as evident in the following passage:

> But then there was Spanish. *Español*: my family's language. *Español:* the language that seemed to me a private language…
> A family member would say something to me [in Spanish] and I would feel myself especially recognized. My parents would say something to me and I would feel embraced by the sounds of their words. Those sounds said: *I am speaking with ease in Spanish. I am addressing you in words I never use with* los gringos*. I recognize you as someone special, close, like no one outside. You belong with us. In the family.*
> *(Ricardo.)* (14-15) (emphasis original)

While English is *gringo* language, Spanish is the language of his family, language of acceptance, love, and intimacy. The private language shapes the identity of Ricardo, as opposed to Richard. In the above passage Ricardo resides within a parenthesis, marked as both private and separate, and even repressed and rejected; it is almost as if this name should not be uttered—it can only be whispered in secret.[18] While it is clear that the writer remembers with warmth his family home reverberating with the joyful sound of Spanish, the pleasure of remembering both his home and himself as Ricardo somehow feels wrong, somehow seems illicit. Richard did not simply create this antagonistic relationship between English and Spanish in a vacuum.[19] As Kim Potowski contends, "for some monolingual English-speaking Americans, knowing English is not sufficient to be considered a true American. One must completely abandon the language of their country of origin, as a rite of passage or a cost of entry" (13). We see that for Richard, he is embarking on this passage from one lingual-cultural world to another.

As I have touched on earlier in this essay, the native Spanish speaker's learning of English in the United States can be compared to colonized peoples being forced to learn the language of the colonizers.[20] As the post-colonial theorist Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o's argues, "The domination of a people's language by the languages of the colonizing nations was crucial to the domination of the mental universe of the colonized" (16). It is through language and other types of cultural education that colonizers controlled "how people perceived themselves and their relationship to the world" (16). Having learned that English is the proper

[18] See Rolando J. Romero's "Spanish and English: The Question of Literacy in *Hunger of Memory*" for an interesting discussion of the Spanish-private-English-public split in terms of oral and written languages.

[19] Henry Staten argues that the Rodriguez's sense of the private comes from his view of religion: "privacy for him is an unplumbable metaphysical depth… Only the Catholic Church of his childhood… could mediate between the individual's absolute privacy and the community of believers" (109).

[20] It is true, as Raymund A. Paredes points out, that Rodriguez does not mention anti-colonial writers or thinkers such as Fanon or Ngũgĩ despite the link he draws between himself and Caliban in Shakespeare's *The Temptest*. And even the Caliban reference Paredes believes is misleading: "Rodriguez's Caliban steals no book but rather timidly absorbs those texts that are given him. He will have 'some run of the isle' because he has been culturally and socially assimilated and poses no threat to Prospero's descendants. Rodriguez's highly conditioned imagination can barely accommodate the possibility of an aggressive, liberated Caliban and, once having entertained the possibility of such a figure, can certainly not sustain his development" (292). I argue that, although he may not emerge as "an aggressive, liberated Caliban," the linguistic and cultural constraints pressuring Rodriguez echo those in the colonial context of Caliban and other colonized peoples.

language of the United States, then, Richard learns that fluent English speakers have more confidence, more power, than those who speak it haltingly or even worse, not at all.[21]

This type of learning about proper and improper language, then, leads to Rodriguez's perception that Spanish is the wrong tongue for a true American. As Isabel Bustamante-López claims in her socio-linguistic study of Mexican-Americans in Southern California, "Spanish… is not the language of prestige," and the subjects of her study describe their shift to "English as the language of power, prestige and instruction" (286). *Hunger of Memory* takes a step further in showing that not only by mastering the English language, but also by erasing the lingual traces of the other, Rodriguez can have power and legitimacy in the U.S.[22]

While bilinguality in today's society is seen as an asset to a person's prospects, the formation of a bilingual reality for Rodriguez is fraught with pain and confusion, and the main problem is the split between the two lingual worlds, again, not unlike Du Bois's articulation of separate spheres. It is clear that in Richard's understanding, there can be no mix of the two realms, as he writes: "For me there were none of the gradations between public and private society so normal to a maturing child. Outside the house was public society; inside the house was private" (15). In an essay that compares Rodriguez's *Hunger of Memory* with Eva Hoffman's *Lost in Translation: A Life in a New Language* (1990), Petra Fachinger criticizes both works as endorsing a separation from home and private culture rather than embracing it within their respective immigrant histories. She makes such statements as "They [the two authors] essentialize 'English' as a monolithic structure" (124) and "they believe in the separation of the private and the public" (125). While Hoffman's text is outside the purview of this essay, certainly for Rodriguez's text these statements seem to assume too much control on the part of the minority subject.[23] As Pratt points out, English is a monolithic structure in the U.S. and the private versus public split is externally induced by that structure.[24] Werner Sollors similarly claims that an "ideal of monolingualism… has captivated the contemporary United States—despite the fact that this country has an impressive multilingual past and present all the same" (2). Using Sollors's language, I would say that this monolingual ideal has "captivated" (or captured) Richard despite his rich multilingual life. While it is fair to say that Rodriguez does not adequately resist this type of linguistic captivity, his book clearly shows its painful effects that undermine the process of his identity formation.[25]

Rather than a conscious decision on the young Richard's part, this public-private split is fully internalized and defined by sound and language. It is reflected even at the very basic level of Richard leaving the house to go to the grocery store. The outside world reverberates with the "sounds of the

[21] In this vein also applicable is Franz Fanon's statement: "The Negro of the Antilles will be proportionately whiter—that is, he will come closer to being a real human being—in direct ratio to his mastery of the French language... A man who has a language consequently possesses the world expressed and implied by that language… Mastery of language affords remarkable power" (18).

[22] See Kim Potowski and Maria Carreira's "Spanish in the U.S." for an overview of the particular language's history and current issues.

[23] The question of whether one can resist interpellation, especially in the case of racial interpellation, has been addressed by Rey Chow in his reading of Fanon's writings. Chow claims that Fanon demonstrates that "nonparticipation in the transindividual situation of racialization (or racializing interpellation) is in fact out of the question" (5). I agree with this unavoidability and extend this idea to the split in private versus public spheres in bilingual persons growing up in the U.S.

[24] Antonio C. Marquez connects this split to the "Mexican cultural trait of adamantly refusing to expose to public view—to the knowledge of strangers—family and personal secrets" (136).

[25] Furthermore, I would argue that this imperfect interpellation is itself a kind of resistance, in the sense of Homi Bhabha's theory of colonial mimicry of "difference that is almost the same, but not quite" (126) functioning as "at once resemblance and menace" (127). If even the most exemplary, self-identified assimilated man cannot rid himself of the trace of his former self, he ultimately reveals the limitation of the assimilating project.

gringo" and his home with the faint sound of his mother's Spanish. His going back and forth, hearing the competing sounds of two languages, would be chaotic and unsettling. As Rodriguez writes: "Plainly, it is not healthy to hear such sounds so often. It is not healthy to distinguish public words from private sounds so easily. I remained cloistered by sound, timid and shy in public, too dependent on voices at home" (16).[26]

The doubleness of such a split identity does not afford stable subjectivity. As Rodriguez discusses later, to become a proper American one needs to solely inhabit the public and thereby leave behind the private. But for some, this is not possible due to limitations to language acquisition. The sound of Richard's parents' language in the public exhibits this difficulty: "…their high-whining vowels and guttural consonants; their sentences that got stuck with 'eh' and 'ah' sounds; the confused syntax; the hesitant rhythm of sounds so different from the way *gringos* spoke" (13) (emphasis original).

Because of the tonal and stylistic distinctiveness of a non-native speaker using the English language as evidenced above, their English does not signal public American identity but their distance from it. Again, the colonial context gives us a heightened example of what hybridized and accented language could mean, as Franz Fanon explains: "He [the colonized] knows what the poets call the *divine gurgling* (listen to Creole) is only a halfway house between pidgin-nigger and French. The middle class in the Antilles never speak Creole except to their servants. In school the children of Martinique are taught to scorn the dialect" (20) (emphasis original).

The ways in which Richard cringes at his parents' English come from a conditioning similar to that of Fanon's colonial society.[27] It signals their difference, their non-gringo status. This is why their lack of fluency causes Richard's "clutching trust in their protection and power [to] weaken…" (13). Their accented language shows their lack of belonging and power in public American society.

Unlike his parents whose formative years were far-gone, Richard's still lay ahead, and not long after his formal schooling begins, he finds himself having entered the realm of the public through language: "One day in school I raised my hand to volunteer an answer. *I spoke out in a loud voice*. And I did not think it remarkable when *the entire class understood*. That day, I moved very far from the disadvantaged child I had been only days earlier. The belief, the calming assurance that I belonged in public, had at last taken hold" (21, emphasis mine).

The italicized parts "I spoke out…" and "the entire class understood" convey a sense of shock as well as pleasure in the moment. It is a clear example of accomplishment that would fast-forward the uncertain and even terrified Ricardo into the realm of "calming assurance." But this entrance into one world would be an exit from another, for soon "the special feeling of closeness at home was diminished" (22) and even words like "*mamá and papá"* seemed too strange to use; "[t]hey would have been too painful reminders of how much had changed in [his]… life" (23) (emphasis original). Richard grows up as a top student, receives scholarships, and eventually becomes an academic and a writer, but his successes would never be separate from the attendant feeling of loss.[28]

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[26] Rodriguez is quick to remind the reader right after the above lines that he still was an "extremely happy child at home" (16). This is important contextual information. Rather than thinking about this private-public split as some illness or deformity, neither of which was true in Rodriguez's case, this oscillation between the private and the public should be understood as a unique aspect of the formation of bilingual subjects.

[27] In a more extreme but familiar anecdote where Gloria Alzaldúa was reprimanded for speaking Spanish at school, she remembers her teacher saying, "If you want to be American, speak 'American.' If you don't like it, go back to Mexico where you belong" (53). Multilinguality is a feature of the Borderlands that Alzaldúa theorizes, a space where nations, histories, and identities collide and transform. In this vein Loes Nas reads Alvarez's novel as exploring multiple borderlands, one of which being linguistic (133).

[28] In discussing Ngũgĩ Wa Thiong'o's essay "The Language of African Literature" in *Decolonising the Mind*, Rey Chow writes: "a formal education offered with the explicit message of the supremacy of English over African native

Given that the United States has always been a country of immigrants, the emergence of a monolingual population means that generations of immigrants experienced this language loss. As Pratt writes, "The United States is full of families whose older and younger generations can't converse or develop complex relationships with one another, and who suffer for it" (14).[29] The last chapter of his book paints a picture of this exact generational divide in the Rodriguez household. Richard's relationship to his parents has become one of silence: no intimate language. At a family gathering when his father asks if he is going home, Richard realizes that this is the only utterance of his father the entire evening. This silence that surrounds his parents seems like "an extraordinary oppression" and leaves him feeling entirely lost about their thoughts, memories, and feelings (201). This persistent reminder of what is lost—the private world of Spanish—even when one has gained a public American identity in English, undercuts the legitimacy of Rodriguez's subjectivity. In this way Rodriguez's interpellation is not quite complete; it has not been cleanly executed.

Julia Alvarez's *How the Garcia Girls Lost Their Accents* on Their Way to Americanization

The same cultural mapping along the private-public axis that was evident in Richard Rodriguez's memoir can also be seen in Alvarez's novel. The Garcias' Dominican culture and identity belong to the private sphere of their home, whereas American culture and identity belong outside of their home, in the public. Alvarez also configures the process of Americanization as a move from the private-Dominican to the public-American, but rather than simply a triumph, entrance into the public dominant culture means permanently altering their sense of the private. While many factors affect this unsettling passage, language arguably plays a primary role. I contend that for a first-generation bilingual immigrant growing up in the United States, English language learning is tied to her formation as an American subject. More severe than the sense of loss in Rodriguez's autobiography, painful and traumatic experiences of violence and violation attend this process of subject-formation.[30] While a number of the novel's episodic chapters shed light on the family's immigration and acculturation process, the chapter "Trespass" holds my particular interest because it provides, in my view, a complex but revealing theoretical model of the lingual-cultural identity formation I have been discussing in this article.

"Trespass" unfolds around Carla, the eldest of the sisters at twelve years of age, celebrating her family becoming "one American year old" (150).[31] Rather than feeling joyous, however, Carla believes that she "lost everything" on the day she came to the U.S. and wishes that God would take her back "home." Carla's sense of displacement is due to her feeling of being un-American, being culturally and racially other. This is what she is reminded of daily by taunting boys at school, who "chase after her, calling her names" such as "dirty spic" and chanting, "Go back to where you came from" (153). The specific words used by the boys signal Carla's racial and ethnic otherness, and her cultural displacement. In Richard Rodriguez's case, race

languages would be something of a doubly traumatic interpellation. The subject in question is constituted in none other than a condition of being caught between languages—and further, between languages not simply as skills but as indexes of cultural superiority and inferiority" (39).

[29] François Grojean similarly writes, "This pressure to Americanize and to become monolingual in English has led the country into a bizarre paradox: most Americans, many of whose families are originally of a foreign language background, prove to be extremely incompetent in learning and speaking foreign languages" (66).

[30] In this vein Mary Louis Pratt writes that the dogma of American monolingualism brings "social and epistemic violence" (14).

[31] While I situate *Garcia Girls* in the tradition of U.S. immigrant literature, David T. Mitchell insistently calls Alvarez a postcolonial writer and places the novel in the neo-colonial history of the U.S. and the Dominican Republic. He reads the novel's shifting cultural identifications as an instance of the "nationalist ambivalence in postcolonial narratives" (167).

and ethnicity are implicit markers of identity behind language, but his understanding that the public sphere belonged to the *gringos* implies that by contrast he is the racial other. In Alvarez's novel, there is no doubt that the U.S. public marks individuals along racial and ethnic lines, and the Garcia sisters are thus clearly marked as different from the white majority.

While the private-public structure that undergirds various cultural negotiations is evident in both Rodriguez's and Alvarez's texts, one distinctive feature of *Garcia Girls* is the explicit addition of gender and sexuality into the mix.[32] Parallel to the private versus public and Dominican versus American binaries, Alvarez sets up sexual innocence versus sexual knowledge as another move in Carla's identity formation. Thus, as Carla struggles to understand racial codes,[33] she also confronts markers of womanhood through her changing body. It is telling that the boys' taunts are about gender as well as race. Their harassment includes pulling out her blouse, lifting her skirt, and commenting on her body, saying "No titties," and "Monkey legs" (153). Unable to understand her approaching womanhood, Carla is ashamed of her maturing body, as exemplified in the following passage: "...there was this body whose daily changes she noted behind the closed bathroom door until one of her sisters knocked that Carla's turn was over. How she wished she could wrap her body up the way she'd heard Chinese girls had their feet bound so that they wouldn't grow big" (153-54).

What is noteworthy about this passage is that in private, she studies her body and its changes, but when she thinks of others seeing her, she wants it to be hidden and unnoticed. This goes to show that in the public eye, she does not want to be marked as a woman, marked in gendered terms. In the way that her race-ethnicity stands as a category that signifies her difference, so does her gender establish her as the other.

At the center of this transitional stage in Carla's life is language. Carla's successful Americanization is dependent upon her English proficiency, and she works arduously to achieve it. New English expressions catch her attention; for instance, she learns the idiom "by heart" and practices it during her walks (152). She is fascinated by new proper nouns, for example, car names such as "Fords and Falcons and Corvairs and Plymouth Valiants" (155), overheard from the taunting boys' conversations. While she thus labors to acquire the language of an American, she is often frustrated by her limitations. One such moment is when she pleads with the teasing boys, "Stop!... Please Stop," but the boys respond in mimicry, "Eh-stop... Plees eh-stop" (153). Having been betrayed by her accent, she is further mortified by their taunts, and thinks: "They were disclosing her secret shame; her body was changing. The girl she had been back home in Spanish was being shed. In her place—almost as if the boys' ugly words and taunts had the power of spells—was a hairy, breast-budding grownup no one would love" (153).

The object of shame is her body, where her race and gender are written, and connecting her body to the shedding of her identity "back home in Spanish" suggests that this new identity is linguistically inscribed as well. This exposed being, by implication a public subject, is thus racialized, gendered, and linguistic, but this new identity is only inchoate at the moment, not yet human and semi-beastly. When Carla adequately acquires language (loses the accent) and possesses the same "power of spells" that the boys possess, as we will see later, Carla will fully form as a public subject, as a proper American.

In this world of physical, linguistic, and cultural change, an incident of indecent exposure forcibly pushes Carla into the realm of the public. This points to a key difference from the way the move from the

[32] For a study of gender and sexuality in the subtext of *Hunger of Memory*, see Randy A. Rodriguez's "Richard Rodriguez Reconsidered: Queering the Sissy (Ethnic) Subject"; Yaakov Perry's "Metaphors We Write By: Desire's (Dis)Orientation and the Border in Richard Rodriguez's *Hunger of Memory*"; and George Newtown's "In the Closet with 'Mr. Secrets.'"

[33] Earlier in describing the taunting boys, Carla thought, "Their pale bodies did not seem real but were like costumes they were wearing" (154).

private to the public is articulated in Rodriguez's autobiography. While Rodriguez saw this process as a natural result of being publicly educated, Alvarez configures it more violently through an experience of sexual trauma.[34] The episode begins when someone calls her from a car. I have mentioned Carla's fascination with but inability to register car names. Not knowing its make, Carla describes it in the following way: "It was a lime green car, sort of medium sized, and with a kind of long snout, so had it been a person, Carla would have described it as having a long nose. A long-nosed, lime-green car" (155).

Since Alvarez deploys a third-person limited perspective, the narrator's description must be understood as belonging to Carla, and here we see that because Carla lacks the exact language, she must use different references to make sense of this public situation. She has difficulty describing the man (156) and the ensuing scene of the sexual exposure (158). The man's penis is called the "thing" and his demeanor after ejaculation is described as "relaxed" with his head "bowed... as if in prayer."

Carla's lack of language evident in the third person limited narration is even more prominent in the dialogue with the police that follows the incident. Carla was initially hiding in the kitchen; she is then asked to come out to face the police. She sees two officers: one described as a "young man with a face no older than the boys' faces at school on top of a large, muscular man's body" and the other "also big and fair-skinned, look[ing]... older because of his meaner, sharp-featured face" (160). The narrator tells us more: "Their very masculinity offended and threatened. They were so big, so strong, so male, so American." They then begin to interrogate Carla, asking her about the car; she naturally stumbles when they ask her about the make of the car, and can only describe the man with simple words—saying that the man had "nothing on his head," which they figure out to mean bald. As they progress, Carla begins to dread having to talk about the naked man himself, but the police keep pushing her. When the scene peaks at the highest point of her anxiety, Carla sees the police in a new light: "Carla was forced to confront the cop's face. It was indeed an adult version of the sickly white faces of the boys in the playground. This is what they would look like once they grew up. There was no meanness in the face, no kindness either. No recognition of the difficulty she was having in trying to describe what she had seen with her tiny English vocabulary" (162).

After this point, she finally communicates to them, albeit indirectly, that the man was masturbating, and when she finishes, she again imagines the taunting boys, this time she imagines being pictured in the following day's newspaper along with the boys. She then has an urge to report them to the police: "She would have the words to describe them: their mean, snickering faces she knew by heart. Their pale look-alike sickly bodies. Their high voices squealing with delight when Carla mispronounced some word they coaxed her to repeat" (164). Although the interview ends before Carla could tell the police about the boys, and most likely she would not have reported them had the interview continued, the conflation of the police and the boys provides a key in understanding the dynamic of the police interrogation. Although the police are guarantors of safety and peace in the public space of the U.S., they also represent the forces that decide who does and who does not belong. When Carla superimposes the white boys' faces onto those of the policemen, she subconsciously understands the exclusivity of the nation state and its implicit white masculinity.

The chapter "Trespass" of Alvarez's novel almost perfectly demonstrates the process of interpellation that Althusser articulates. As he describes the ideology's call through a policeman's hailing, a similar call

[34] In his insistent reading of Alvarez's novel as "a paean for the cognitive and social benefits of bilingualism," Juan Pablo Rivera overlooks the very painful process of becoming and living as a bilingual in a society that champions monolingualism (127). Textual evidence of this struggle includes mental illness, a suicide attempt, and the lingual-sexual violation that I am analyzing in "Trespass." In this vein I also disagree with his claim that "trauma in Alvarez's novel is often downplayed, especially as it pertains to sexual violence" (131). While this may be true of the childhood sexual exploration that happens in "The Human Body," the chapter he cites as an example, sexual violation and manipulation elsewhere leave lasting effects on the characters.

occurs but dispersed in different moments. First the boys' taunts are a hailing—the subject of which is immediately understood by Carla as herself; then the hailing of the flasher—again Carla automatically going up to the car to witness the illicit scene; then the hailing of the policemen in the interrogation that Carla cannot avoid. These situations are fitting as moments of interpellation—the composite effect as hailing a soon-to-be American subject. Unlike the generic addresser and the addressee of Althusser's scenario, however, the players are clearly marked in terms of race, ethnicity, and gender. The addresser is white, male, and American; the addressee is Dominican and female, a target of racial slurs and sexual violence. In the linguistic context, as well, the state calls to her specifically in English while she is a native Spanish speaker who is only beginning to learn English. Considering these various identity positions and the language difference, I do not imagine Carla's turn to be automatic but rather unsure and perhaps laden with fear. I would argue that this hesitation and fear complicate the Althusserian model of interpellation. A bilingual ethnic subject's relationship to ideology, then, is structurally ambivalent; even as they constitute as a subject, their subjection is always questionable.

Conclusion: Trespassing and the Bilingual Latinx Subject

The analysis of Rodriguez's memoir and Alvarez's novel reveals similar ways in which bilingual Mexican American and Dominican American subjects are formed. Richard and Carla both develop a public identity through the acquisition of the English language; in the way Richard uses English in his school for the first time and is understood, Carla eventually communicates to the police and afterwards confidently imagines "hav[ing]...the words to describe" the taunting boys. However, the analysis also shows how this acquisition of a public American identity is predicated upon, or more correctly coincides with being marked as other; the success of Americanization is a failure in other ways.

The ambivalent nature of acquiring a public identity only by losing a private one and moreover the pain and trauma that attend that move are illustrated quite brilliantly by the metaphor of trespassing. Early in the chapter Carla and Mami walk to a bus stop and come across a sign on a barbed-wire fence written, "PRIVATE, NO TRESPASSING." Having encountered the word "trespass" only in the Lord's Prayer—in the phrase "forgive us our trespasses"—Carla misunderstands the sign and says to her mother, "Isn't that funny, Mami? A sign that you have to be good." Mami, realizing where the confusion comes from, tells her that: "Words sometimes meant two things in English... This trespass meant that no one must go inside the property because it was not public like a park, but private. Carla nodded, disappointed. She would never get the hang of this new country" (151).

This passage economically places language and national-cultural identity in the context of the private and the public. It suggests that while language acquisition and getting the "hang of this new country" are a necessity, one must remember to keep separate the public and the private spheres because to breech the boundary is to break the law. What this means is that since to become an American one must cross the boundary into the public world, the formation of an ethnic American subject fundamentally signals a moment of trespass; as the other to the white American patriarchal ideal (the standard for a public identity), her newly acquired place in the national scene is already in trouble, because of its procurement through trespassing.[35]

[35] Anzaldúa uses the same term to describe the Spanish-speaking people of the Southwest: "Gringos in the U.S. Southwest consider the inhabitants of the borderlands transgressors, aliens—whether they possess documents or not, they're Chicanos, Indians or Blacks. Do not enter, trespassers will be raped, maimed, strangled gassed shot. The only 'legitimate' inhabitants are those in power, the whites and those who align themselves with whites" (3-4).

In her reading of Althusser's theorization of interpellation, Judith Butler points out that the turn toward the policeman's call pre-supposes "one who has broken the law" such that "'guilt' is prior to knowledge of the law" (108). Later she elaborates:

> "Submission" to the rules of the dominant ideology might then be understood as a submission to the necessity to prove innocence in the face of accusation, a submission to the demand for proof, an execution of that proof, and acquisition of the status of the subject in and through compliance with the terms of the interrogative law… to become a "subject" is to be continuously in the process of acquitting oneself of the accusation of guilt. (118)

While Butler's reading is not about applying Althusser's theories to ethnic minorities, it is fascinating how well the ideas of guilt and the need for continual absolution perfectly fit the case of subject formation that I have been charting. The idea of trespassing precedes the ethnic subject's interpellation into the nation-state, thus making them already guilty even as they turn to the law. But being called means that they are fit to be a subject—now assimilated—through accentless English and/or other cultural capital. However, as Butler explains, the subject is never off the hook; they have to continue to police their own behavior and thoughts. For Richard Rodriguez, this means that he must continually cover up his longing for his former Spanish-centered life; for Carla, it means that she must continually keep at bay the insecure and terrified girl who did not have the proper language and understanding of white society.

In this way, trespassing as transgression could be understood as the other, unspoken side of the discourse of Americanization. Despite the promise of citizenship and full inclusion into the national scene, the repeated messages of otherness and accusations of deficiency follow assimilated individuals. Such demands of the public constantly threaten the private lives of individuals, so much so that the public becomes the trespasser in their lives. The fact that the policemen come into the Garcias' home for interrogation exemplifies such a threat to the private sphere. Yes, they are there to investigate a crime, but in all the ways I have discussed the scene above, they threaten, shame, and even violate Carla. The following passage toward the end of the chapter, after Carla had been moved to the public school and the boys had stopped taunting her, further illustrates this point: "... [the boys'] faces did not fade... from Carla's life. They *trespassed* in her dreams and in her waking moments. Sometimes when she woke in the dark, they were perched at the foot of her bed, a grim chorus of urchin faces, boys without bodies, chanting without words, "Go back! Go back!" (164, emphasis mine).

The notion of trespass here works inversely. What the boys represent—white, male, American—seeps into her private, psychic life and stays there. Perhaps the earlier moment when Carla and her mother looked at the "No Trespass" sign for "Private Property" foreshadows the end when such a sign would prove to be pointless. For Rodriguez, it is even more evident that the public has infiltrated into his private life; the former has almost obliterated the latter. And yet, as memory works to revive the young Ricardo who heard private voices and felt family intimacies even as he was called into the public world of English and white culture, the readers of his memoir see that his private space still exists but in an impure form. Both Richard and Carla are standing on private and public grounds, inevitably trespassing on both; this double trespassing then could be considered the basis of their subjection, coming into being as an ethnic American.

I want to end by returning to the key moments of Carla's subject formation—the boys' taunt, the man's indecent exposure, and the police interrogation. All three moments, in varying degrees and levels violate and shame Carla. While occupying oppositional spheres and possessing conflicting allegiances means that ethnic Americans live with the feeling of having trespassed and being trespassed upon, the consequences of trauma could be painful and even debilitating. When Carla revisits these episodes in her dreams, she prays and remembers "familiar names" that "coax her back to sleep with a feeling of safety, of a world still

peopled by those who loved her" (165). This need for familiarity, safety, and love may not be met in public and the private worlds, but Carla imagines a third world of "people" who "love her," a communal space of support and understanding. While this communal space is not completely separate from the public and the private spheres, it could exist temporarily on another turf, providing relief and healing from the demands of a neither fully private nor public existence.

Whereas Richard imagines an alternative community of readers who embrace his story and feel for his struggles. He imagines that a new form of intimacy will substitute for the lost Spanish-centered one from his childhood: "…I have come to think that there is a place for the deeply personal in public life. This is what I have learned by trying to write this book: there are things so deeply personal that they can be revealed only to strangers. I believe this. I continue to write" (201).

While his first private world of intimates—the family home with words echoing in Spanish—cannot be recuperated, his writing in the mode of the memoir allows him to carve out an alternative private space of teller and listener. For Alvarez and Rodriguez, then, it is the place of imagination, expression, and writing, all linguistically oriented but not clearly defined by cultural restrictions, that ironically helps them to move beyond the earlier linguistic displacement and violation. Perhaps this last imaginative-linguistic move will not prove to be a trespass but one that is welcomed and embraced by a community of sympathetic and understanding readers.

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Author

Sun Hee Teresa LEE is Associate Professor of English at Gustavus Adolphus College in Minnesota, USA. She specializes in U.S. Ethnic Literatures and has published articles in *Journal of American Drama* and *MELUS: Multiethnic Literatures of the United States*. Her current research topics include mutilinguality in U.S. Literature, bilingual pedagogy in U.S. higher education, and the impact of global media on filmic adaptations of U.S. ethnic literatures.

Contact: slee6@gustavus.edu

Özge Üstündağ Güvenç
Çankaya University (Turkey)

From Socially Constructed Subjectivity to Matrixial Subjectivity in Doris Lessing's "Debbie and Julie"

Abstract: The formation of subjectivity based on the woman-body and man-mind association has resulted in female inferiority and male dominance. As Kate Cregan states "… the body has been categorized as emotional and feminized in opposition to the masculinized rational mind," (82) and therefore, regarded as unruly. Moreover, the female body, particularly during pregnancy and childbirth, has been an arena of power dynamics as it is characterized by instability and indeterminacy. This essentialist approach reveals how the biological determinism of the female body is socially constructed, relegated to a subordinate presence and naturalized in a male-dominated society. Doris Lessing's short story "Debbie and Julie" from her *London Observed: Stories and Sketches* (1993) undermines such fallacious views concerning the female body by foregrounding a young pregnant girl's exploration of her subjectivity from the prenatal to postnatal period through her relational interaction with docile and marginal bodies as well as the baby both inside and outside her body. Hence, this article displays how female bond, pregnancy and childbirth generate alternative views for a pregnant teenager in attaining her subjectivity within the framework of Bracha L. Ettinger's "Matrixial Theory."

Keywords: Doris Lessing, "Debbie and Julie," Female Body, Pregnancy, Childbirth, Bracha Ettinger, Matrixial Subjectivity

Introduction

Doris Lessing's short story "Debbie and Julie" from her *London Observed: Stories and Sketches* (1993) undermines fallacious views concerning the female body and shows how a young teenage girl achieves a sense of consciousness of her own body during pregnancy and childbirth. Like Lessing's other feminist works such as the five-novel sequence collected under the title of *Children of Violence* (1952) and *The Golden Notebook* (1962) that probe the struggle of women for self-discovery and autonomy in a male dominated society, "Debbie and Julie" offers discerning approaches to phallogocentric understandings of female subjectivity. In this story, Lessing delves deeply into the problems of young teenage girls living in a metropolitan city through a focus on the process of subjectivization of an innocent girl, Julie. The story revolves around Julie's impregnation by a friend in the school cloakroom and escape from her father's house in the suburbs of London to the city center in order to bear the extra marital child. Julie's decision to flee her parents rather than staying at home safe and sound draws the attention to the established and solidified social constructions, which Lessing names "a series of prisons called race, class, male and female…" in an interview by Christopher Bigsby (78). Such classifications categorize people along certain identities and groups in which they feel under pressure because of expected roles and unwritten rules. It is the same with Julie because she is no longer an innocent teenage but pregnant Julie, a young mother-to-be with a so-called illegitimate child. So, away from the criticisms of her parents and social pressure, Julie looks for an alternative way to deal with her pregnancy and have some degree of personal and bodily freedom. What is most striking about Julie's experiences as a pregnant teenage girl is her protection by a prostitute, Debbie whom Julie randomly meets "on the platform at Waterloo" (Lessing 4), and Debbie's offer of a shelter in her flat for Julie during pregnancy, and last but not least, Julie's use of a derelict shed as "her refuge" (Lessing 5) for childbirth. Julie's pregnancy, escape from home, temporary stay in an escort

flat and solitary childbirth, display a young and pregnant teenage girl's ambivalent position in the city, trying to figure out who she is, who she wants to be, and what she wants to do with her body and unborn baby. Considering the spaces Julie occupies during the prenatal, natal and postnatal periods like Debbie's flat and the derelict shed in the city, there is also spatial-temporal ambivalence, which I will claim to be a sort of liminality[36] in Julie's life. Thus, by focusing on her lived experience—reckoning with fears of pregnancy and re-discovery of the body in Debbie's flat as well as concern for her physical and mental performance during childbirth in the shed—I argue that Julie struggles against her prisons, takes advantage of her liminal position in liminal spaces, and by doing so, takes a step further in the process of becoming, embracing differences and exploring her subjectivity through a relational interaction with Debbie and the baby, both inside and outside her body. With reference to Bracha L. Ettinger's post-phallic theorization of subjectivity, what she calls "Matrixial Theory," my analysis examines how female bond, pregnancy, childbirth and maternal instincts in liminal spaces generate alternative views for Julie in attaining a female subjectivity after her corporeal and mental transformation.

As the female characters in Lessing's story—Julie, her mother Anne, Auntie Jessie and Debbie—live under the oppressive and regulatory practices of male-dominated society, the extent to which they can go beyond socially constructed female subjectivity is my focus. In this regard, discussions on subjectivity and the body are discernible aspects of this study. As Chris Weedon puts it, in most feminisms "women's subjectivities and experiences of everyday life become the site of the redefinition of patriarchal meanings and values and of resistance to them…" (6). Like their everyday life, the female body becomes an arena of social control because of its connection with emotions. For Cregan, the body has been associated with women's sensitivity to feelings contrary to the association of men with rational mind (82). Hence, the woman-body and man-mind connection leads to female inferiority and subjugation under male domination. Such negativity of the female body is embedded in everyday life, which is evident in "Debbie and Julie." Contrary to this hegemonic discourse, several feminist critics do not consider the woman-body connection "as a unified, closed and given category" (Shildrick and Price 218) imposed upon women, rather they regard it as the agency of female empowerment in the formation of their subjectivity (Adrienne Rich, *Of Woman Born…*; W.C. Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto…"; Judith Butler, *Bodies That Matter…*; Elizabeth Grosz *Volatile Bodies….*, and *Space, Time and Perversion…..*; Susan Bordo, *Unbearable Weight…*; Moira Gatens, *Imaginary Bodies…*; Iris Marion Young, *On Female Body…*). Thus, the body comes to prominence through their theories, enabling women "to discover and reappropriate themselves as subjects" and reclaim "what had always been theirs but had been usurped from them: control over their bodies and a voice with which to speak about it […]" (Suleiman 43). They retheorize the body in alternative ways to question the dichotomous thinking which "disavow[s] the role of the body" (Grosz, *Space* 26) and particularly relegates the female body.

In a similar vein, the phenomena of pregnancy and childbirth, peculiar to the female body, has also been discussed and shaped by patriarchal doctrines. As Clare Hanson puts it, the pregnant body is defined as "a troubling, disruptive body. Its most striking characteristic is its mutability, as it expands, dilates, contracts and expels. It is also leaky and permeable... Its borders, then, are indeterminate" (87). Bodily activities related to pregnancy such as impregnation, birth, contraction, expulsion as well as the ones related to delivery including blood, mucous, placenta, underline the complex materiality of women's body.

[36] Liminality derives from the Latin word "limen," which means "threshold." Drawing on Arnold Van Gennep's ideas of "liminal (or threshold) rites" referring to rites of passage ceremonies in tribal communities, Victor Turner in his book *The Ritual Process: Structure and Anti-Structure* (1966), explains the transitional phases in two-fold: spatial "separation, margin, and reaggregation" and temporal "preliminal, liminal, and postliminal" (166). The individual separates from the known self in the preliminal phase, then moves to a state of in-betweennes in the liminal phase, and finally, gains a new sense of self in the postliminal phase.

Characterized by instability and indeterminacy, the pregnant person provokes "fear" as she "defies dominant forms of representation..." (Hanson 87) of the female body marked by order and compliance. Regarding the female body as a mechanism functioning for such activities is an essentialist approach based on biological determinism. Simone de Beauvoir states in *The Second Sex* that the pregnant woman "passively submits to her biological destiny" (98) and accepts male control. However, this means "to surrender to limitations, to deny the possibility of change" (Birke 1). As Anna Wetterberg claims, there are assumptions related to appropriate "behavioural standards to which pregnant women comply" (27), because a pregnant woman becomes "a body in need of containment due to her specific status as pregnant" (Cummins 36). This also illustrates how the biological process of the female body is socially constructed and treated as a disciplined body. And what is more, a young pregnant woman revealing her fertility might be associated with negativity, as suggested by Lucy Bailey, it is "a visual manifestation of sexual activity..." (117) out of wedlock and a "source of 'social pollution'..." (Lupton 78), and thereby requires discipline. Hence, as the experience of pregnancy has "socio-cultural association with biological determinism" and is used for "the subordination of women" (Bornemark 253), as well as being regarded as unruly, feminist critics theorizing female subjectivity have shown a growing interest in this issue. They claim that the experiences of the female body during and after pregnancy cannot be understood within the limits of phallogocentric thinking because it is both a subjective experience and a complicated one in physical, mental and emotional dimensions.

Ettinger's "Matrixial Theory" is thus useful in providing an alternative viewpoint to deal with the multifaceted aspects of the female body during pregnancy and childbirth, and in illuminating Julie's bond with Debbie and maternal experience, leading to the exploration of her body and subjectivity. Building upon Freud and Lacan's theorization of the formation of subjectivity, Ettinger proposes her matrixial theory offering "dimensions of subjectivity beyond-the-Phallus" (Pollock, "Introduction" 8). She argues that both psychoanalysts discuss subjectivity formation by centering the status of the concept of the Phallus. As Ettinger puts it, "Freud established a proximity between Phallus and the male sexual organ based on 'natural' identity. For Lacan, the Phallus is not male but universal... the privileges of men are linked to conventions and are structured by history, language, hidden ideologies, and the social power system... [Both approaches to subjectivity formation] reduce[s] the idea of the Symbolic to the idea of the Phallus, the One" (*Matrixial Subjectivity* 100).

This limited, one-sided view of subjectivity urges Ettinger to "separate the equation between Symbol and Phallus" (*Matrixial Subjectivity* 101) and come up with a non-phallic symbolic sphere—the Matrix. To this aim, she focuses on the intrauterine life and, as Griselda Pollok argues in "Thinking the Feminine," Ettinger considers the womb not merely as an organ of the mother standing in opposition to the Phallus (cf. page 8), but, in Ettinger's own words, as "*matrixial borderspace*, the psychic sphere which is trans-subjective" ("Matrixial Trans-subjectivity" 218) (emphasis original). For Ettinger, the matrix "corresponds to a feminine dimension of the symbolic order dealing with asymmetrical, plural, and fragmented subjects composed of the known as well as the not-rejected and not-assimilated unknown, and to unconscious processes of change and transgression in borderlines, limits, and thresholds of 'I' and 'non-I' emerging in co-existence" (*Matrixial Subjectivity* 99).

This is the material and psychic space where "the transgressive encounter between I and non-I" occurs and paves the way for "subjectivization in co-emergence" ("Matrixial Trans-subjectivity" 220) without fusion and rejection. That is, Ettinger refers to the mother as an I, already defined by language after her entry into the society and the baby as a non-I, whose subjectivity has not been shaped yet. While the mother reconstitutes her subjectivity by emerging and becoming with the baby within the shareability of the matrix, the baby is at the beginning of the subjectivization process. Both share the matrix as a spatial and mental dimension from the beginning of pregnancy until the childbirth. During their affectionate

closeness within the matrixial borderspace they emerge together. Ettinger names this process of becoming together "matrixial stratum of subjectivization" ("Matrixial Trans-subjectivity" 218) before birth. As mentioned earlier, Griselda Pollock claims that Ettinger's "reference to pregnancy and intrauterine experience is not an attempt to valorize the womb over the penis in some inversion of gender hierarchies" (8), but a way of thinking subjectivity as a sort of becoming "at shared *borderspaces* between several *partial-subjects*, never entirely fused nor totally lost, but sharing and processing, within difference, elements of each unknown other" ("Thinking the Feminine" 7) (emphasis original).

Here, there are no self-other, male-female, subject-object distinctions based on separation and negativity, rather the emphasis is put on the positive and complementary aspect of the I and non-I togetherness. The mother and the baby (without a gender difference) accompany each other in their journey to subjectivization. Bornemark argues that Ettinger's matrixial trans-subjectivity is "prior to an I that is in opposition to the other and relates to the other as an object" and provides "a transforming borderspace" (258) where the individual female subject can exceed boundaries by reformulating her subjectivity. In Ettinger's terms "behind the veils of any phallic gaze" ("From Proto-ethical" 120), both the I and non-I, the mother and the baby "co-emerge, co-change and co-fade within a shareable web" ("Matrixial Trans-subjectivity" 219). To explain this process, she introduces matrixial "metramorphosis" as "a process of inter-psychic communication and transformation that transgresses the borders of the individual subject, and takes place between several entities" (*The Matrixial Borderspace* 77). As Ettinger claims, "[t]his is a shift aside-beyond the Phallus, an-other symbolic filter" (*Matrixial Subjectivity* 124), which supplements the Lacanian Symbolic by involving both Phallus and Matrix in the formation of subjectivity. So, the mother and the baby are involved in a process of becoming through encounter, exchange, connectivity and relationality within the matrix. This is a "supplementary, shifting, retuning, concurrent paradigm where a non-phallic web of meaning" (Pollock, "Thinking the Feminine" 11) is possible. Ettinger proposes the matrixial borderspace with its material and psychic qualities as a non-phallic dimension where there is only compassionate connectivity and relationality without a contrast or separation between the male and the female, the mother and the baby. She reconsiders the female body via the matrixial and describes the formation of subjectivity through the language of the matrixial, which is not bound by the language of the Father. Thus, Ettinger's "Matrixial Theory" provides affective forms of subjectivity to discuss Julie's explorative journey from the family house, where she observes the performance of docile bodies, to Debbie's flat marked by marginal bodies, and to the derelict garden shed where she discovers her own body anew and meets her baby.

Docile Bodies and Constructed Female Subjectivity: Family House

Through the depiction of Julie's mother, Anne, and Auntie Jessie who are conditioned by manufactured consent[37] to stereotypical naturalized roles as supportive wives and nurturing mothers in their private space, Lessing conveys the theme of female subordination in a male-dominated society, and shows the social circumstances where Julie has grown up. Before Julie discovers her pregnancy leading to her escape from parental authority, she observes her mother's and Auntie Jessie's confinement and imprisonment in their family house. Her mother, Anne, for instance, humbly follows her daily routine: she regularly changes "fluffy pink towels," (15) avoids waste by not having "a pea or a bit of potato left over" (14) and behaves in accordance with the expectations of her husband like sitting "upright in her chair, knees together, feet together" (13). The mother's submissive acts are observed not only in her domestic sphere but also in her

[37] Antonio Gramsci uses the idea of "manufactured consent" ("The Formation of the Intellectuals" 1137) to explain hegemony as he thinks "manufactured consent" is given by people and maintained through the male authority. Likewise, patriarchal norms and values are sustained in conjunction with the consent of women to the existing social order.

bodily movements. With the presence of an authoritative husband, she regulates her actions and is turned into a "docile body" in Foucault's terms. The husband is a conventional representative figure of the patriarchal institution of family, waiting for his wife to obey his rules and by doing so, he renders discipline in the family house where "[power] centers on the body, produces individualizing effects, and manipulates the body as a source of forces that have to be rendered both useful and docile" (Foucault 249) for the constant reproduction of male order. Hence, the mother, through self-discipline, stays docile and useful in the family house by taking good care of her husband, daughter and household chores, and acts as a role model for Julie who is supposed to be the one perpetuating the myth of supportive wife and nurturing mother under male authority. Based on solidified power relations evident in gender roles and bodily movements, spousal relationships, though steady in Julie's family house, lack affection. As the narrator notes through Julie's focalization, "they [Julie's parents] cancelled each other out... They did not disagree. They never raised their voices, or argued. Each day was a pattern of cups of tea, meals, cups of coffee and biscuits, always at exactly the same times, with bedtime as the goal. They seldom went out. They saw very few people, only each other. It was as if they had switched themselves off" (19).

Her parents show no sign of warmth towards each other, they even do not hold or hug Julie; rather they make her feel "the raucous angry irritation" by their looks and "awkward questions" (14). Despite being a young teenage girl in need of parental love and care, Julie experiences mere oppression in the form of male gaze and discipline by reminding her that she should be acting appropriately. This explains why Julie flees home immediately upon discovery of her pregnancy as it would be unthinkable for her to stay in the family house following the path of Auntie Jessie.

Auntie, like Julie's mother, exemplifies another submissive female character as she conforms to a convenience marriage due to her baby out of wedlock. At the age of seventeen, she becomes pregnant, never reveals the father, and thus, is "stuck at home with baby when she should have been out enjoying herself and learning things" (23). She remains out of view since appearing as a young teenage pregnant body is against the social conventions. However, there is a contradiction between the way a pregnant body is conceived as maternal representation of a mother in the making and in the way a young pregnant body is marked by nonconformity to societal values and norms. Hence, confinement and concealment of a pregnant body, as in the case of Auntie, illustrates an act of control and discipline in the family house. Lessing raises the question of female subjectivity in connection with matrimony and maternity within the restrictive borders of private sphere through the depiction of the mother and Auntie from Julie's perspective. As a young and innocent teenage girl, Julie might fall into the trap of naturalizing constructed female subjectivity which she observes in her role models confined in prisons. Lessing also points to Julie's experience of her sexuality with a friend in the school cloakroom, her thoughts of pregnancy and motherhood as a threat for freedom, and dare to flee as signs of female self-determination. Weedon contends that, though the female subject is constituted by the patriarchal discourse, she still exists as "a thinking, feeling and social agent capable of resistance and innovations produced out of the clash between contradictory subject positions and practices" (121), and by the same token, Julie resists against her prisons by bearing the baby away from her parents despite having no one to rely on and nowhere to go. Thus, the widely accepted determinative element of female subjectivity, the body, particularly the docile body, is problematized by Julie as she interrogates the docility of female body in association with her mother and Auntie. And indeed, Julie embodies a liminal subject at the threshold of undergoing transitional stages in her life occupying liminal spaces. In that sense, Julie's family house can be conceived as a preliminal space which she separates from, as well as a postliminal one which she returns to with a new mindset after her relationship with Debbie and maternal experience. The first transitional phase in Julie's life starts with her departure from the preliminality of family house. Even though her pregnancy is not a matter of conscious choice, giving birth to her baby unbeknownst to the family is a cognizant one,

paving the way for Julie to discover marginal bodies and alternative forms of female subjectivity in Debbie's flat.

Re-discovery of the Body and Embracing Differences in Female Subjectivity: Debbie's Flat

Unaware how dangerous her solitary maternal experience might be without parental help and medical support, Julie finds herself "on the platform at Waterloo at midnight" with other girls "standing like a dummy" and "waiting, but not knowing what for" (4). Waterloo is one of the busiest railway stations in London with several platforms and also a liminal space occupied by "liminal *personae* ('threshold people') ..." (Turner 95) (emphasis mine) travelling from one place to another like Julie. The narrator describes Julie as an "ignorant," "innocent and silly" girl who is in a vulnerable situation as there are "baddies" looking at and moving "in on her like sharks" (Lessing 4) at Waterloo. The depiction of men like predatory sharks and the girls' passive act of waiting illustrate another essentialist view of the female body—its commodification and exhibition as a sex object. Julie is now in an unfamiliar environment, at "a sensitive juncture of transition" (Stenner 178) experiencing the liminality of her position, and ironically, she is saved by Debbie, a prostitute at Waterloo, and given a shelter to hide throughout her pregnancy. Since the narrative is internally focalized through Julie to tell her maternal experience, she appears to overshadow Debbie, who has in fact an effective role in shaping Julie's life after her escape from the family house.

Similar to the liminality of Waterloo, Debbie's flat is a transitory place where people are "always off somewhere, or just back" (Lessing 11), making its occupants "liminal *personae*." It is both a private and public space where the division between them is unclear. It is private to a certain extent as Debbie has struggled a lot to own the flat which becomes a safe place of homing for many girls like Julie. They occupy irreconcilable positions with no stable subjectivity within the liminality of Debbie's flat. As the narrator describes through Julie's focalization, it is a "bright rackety place" (1) full of life where people shout, kiss, hug, argue, fight, threaten, weep and scream (19). Through the practice of daily routines, social relations and sharing emotions, Debbie's flat turns into a home for the girls. It is also public as it is occupied by both genders as a place for entertainment, socializing, having sex and drugs (3). Here Julie observes a sort of "war" among the girls who "must make allowances" (3) to obtain men as their client, and experiences the disturbing and threatening looks of these men, particularly the one from Lebanon, making her feel like an object to be possessed. In that sense, the relationship between the girls and the male visitors indicates their reciprocal exchange based on money and sex, and Debbie's flat becomes a place of "paid labour in which sexualised bodies are exposed" (Perregaux 188) and utilized as sex workers. Although what Julie finds out by observation is completely new for her, she enjoys exploring alternative ways of thinking and living as a woman in Debbie's flat because it offers a sanctuary where Julie finds solace, retreat, and establishes a sense of safety and comfort against the uncertainty of the outside world and the restrictive limitations of the family house.

Dissimilar from her family house characterized by repression, Debbie's flat signifies a place of bodily freedom:

> In her house [Julie's family house], her home, they did not see each other naked. Her mother hadn't come in for years when she was having a bath, and she always knocked on the bedroom door. In Debbie's flat people ran about naked or half-dressed and Debbie might answer the door in her satin camiknickers, those great breasts of hers lolling about. Debbie often came in when Julie was in the bath to sit on the loo and chat... (16)

Not only the solace and freedom in the flat but also the feasts invigorate Julie. Unlike her family house where each bit of food is calculated, in Debbie's flat, they eat "the pizzas that arrived all hours of the day," "the Kentucky chicken, the special steak" and a variety of fruits such as grapes, apples, pears,

pomegranates and pawpaws (17). Here, Julie discovers new tastes and experiences multiple emotions, sensations and possibilities of transgression in relation to patriarchal conformity. Being exempt from sex under Debbie's protection due to her pregnancy, Julie becomes more aware of female bodies, embraces differences in female subjectivity through her relation to the other girls, and safely completes the prenatal period in Debbie's flat.

On one occasion, moreover, Julie experiences completely new feelings about her own body. Unlike her lack of love and tenderness in the family house where "they simply did not touch each other," (19) at Debbie's flat Julie sleeps together with Debbie in the same bed, sharing thoughts and feelings in an open way. The narrator reveals their affectionate relationship in one of the nights as follows:

> Julie lay awake, astounded at the revelations this big hot smooth body made, and went on making, even though Debbie was off to sleep again. She never actually 'did anything.' Julie even waited for 'something' to happen. Nothing ever did. Just once Debbie put her hand down to touch the mound of Julie's stomach, but took it quickly away. Julie lay entangled with Debbie, and they were like two cats that have finished washing each other and gone to sleep... (21)

The implication of a potential sexual encounter between the two exemplifies the way Julie explores her emotions, the comfort she finds in her own body and the revelry in the tenderness they share. Their closeness within the liminality of Debbie's flat evokes Ettinger's metramorphosis signifying "*in-between and marginal* actions in the Symbolic connected to the Matrix" (*Matrixial Subjectivity* 127) (emphasis mine). They are already outcasts in the Symbolic, yet occupy a liminal position in Debbie's flat, which allows them to have a sort of matrixial experience. When Julie questions the reasons of Debbie's life as a prostitute and her protection under Debbie's roof, the narrator focalizes on Julie's thoughts: "Debbie had to be like this, because of her hard life. This included something bad that Debbie had never talked about, but it was why she had been so good to Julie. Probably, just like Julie, Debbie had stood very late in a railway station, pregnant, her head full of rubbish about how she would get a job, have the baby, bring it up, find a man who would love her and the baby" (20).

Her thoughts not only show the possible outcomes of being pregnant as a young teenager out of wedlock but also explain why Debbie is "fond of her" (Lessing 20). Assuming that Debbie was pregnant and had to abandon her baby or accidentally lost her baby, Debbie might have substituted Julie for her lost one. That is, she attempts to reconstruct her subjectivity, which remains incomplete due to her loss, through compassion, exchange and connectivity with Julie. As Ettinger argues, "Metramorphosis allows for the creation of new borderlinks, thresholds and margins. It allows for the redistribution of traces of affects, sensations, emotions, libidinal energies and phantasies, and for exchanges of with-in-formation between co-emerging I(s) and non-I(s)" (*Matrixial Subjectivity* 166). Debbie and Julie create a new borderlink where they feel the intimacy and the bond beside the other, sometimes with affection, sometimes with contradictions, which do not seek an explanation. No matter what they experience, Debbie and Julie cling together as they find solace in their togetherness. The strong emotional bond between them enables both to experience a communion and explore their subjectivity anew. Thus, their metramorphic consciousness is "the becoming-threshold of borderlines" (*Matrixial Subjectivity* 121) away from the oppression of phallic gaze. Hence, the liminality of Debbie's flat makes Debbie re-experience temporary co-emergence with Julie. Julie, meanwhile, becomes acquainted with the female body prostituting herself, and her own body and sexuality. Here, Julie learns about the relational encounter and exchange between the bodies and its significance in attaining subjectivity, which she fosters during childbirth.

Subjectivization through the Matrixial Borderspace: Derelict Shed

Having sensed the approaching birth time, Julie leaves Debbie's flat and arrives at the derelict shed, "where she had been only three days before to make sure it was still there, had not been pulled down, and that she could get in the door" (5). Julie's shed, along with many other garden sheds found at the outskirts of London, represents the ugly and poor side of the city which hosts tramps, stray dogs and pregnant teenage girls like Julie. The "dirt" in the shed, "broken hinges," "plants in pots" and thrown pads (5-7) are evidence of these outcasts within the complex materiality of the shed. As there are not "many places where a girl could give birth to a baby in peace and quiet" (8), these garden sheds become temporary shelter for them away from the social coercion that a young pregnant girl is supposed to discipline her body under the law of marriage. Similarly, the derelict shed Julie has found becomes "her refuge" (5), which can also be considered as the second liminal space like Debbie's flat. The shed is liminal as it is a transitory place used by threshold people and exemplifies spatial ambivalence in the city. It is neither a public place where spatial activities take place, nor a private one characterized by privacy and domesticity. The shed, moreover, is not an appropriate place for childbirth because it is filthy and surrounded by "a dark and narrow alley" marked by bad smell and scary atmosphere, and "a yard full of builders' rubbish and rusty skips" (5). Yet, paradoxically, Julie feels safe in the shed as it provides isolation and privacy. Julie protects herself from the worries of the external world first in Debbie's flat, then in the secluded shed. Thus, the liminal shed turns into a place where Julie appears to achieve a sense of consciousness of her own body and baby, outside the manufactured consent of patriarchal values and structures.

Considering Julie's pregnancy from the natal to postnatal period, there are a few phases she undergoes, which evoke Ettinger's "stratum of matrixial trans-subjectivity" ("Matrixial Trans-subjectivity" 218): prior to childbirth—the hour of childbirth—the moment of childbirth—after childbirth. In the first phase of the childbirth ritual, Julie appropriates the shed by using the items in her carrier bag such as "a torch, pieces of string wrapped in a piece of plastic, two pairs of knickers, a cardigan, a thick towel with an old blouse of Debbie's... and some sanitary pads" (Lessing 3). She follows the instructions of a book in which "everything was so tidy and regular" (2), guiding the mother-to-be in the stages of pregnancy. However, there were times when Julie "felt cold water springing from her forehead, hot water running down her legs. She seemed to have pains everywhere, but she could not match what she felt with the book" (2) because the book represents the male view of the pregnant body described as a biological mechanism functioning accordingly. Since it does not correspond to lived experience, Julie questions the certainty of the knowledge in the book, asking "Why didn't the book say there would be all this water all the time?" (7). So, she feels "ill-prepared" and thinks that what she is experiencing could be "uncontrollable" (3). Julie is now at the threshold of exploring the way she and her baby co-emerge within the matrix. She realizes how the birthing process is a complicated and subjective experience peculiar to the female body, which she cannot gain experience through the inadequate knowledge in the book.

The complexity of her childbirth ritual becomes far more intricate when Julie confronts "[a] large dog [standing] in the door, a great black threatening beast" (Lessing 5). She senses its growling and "the gleam of its teeth and eyes" (5). Due to her pregnancy, she becomes more attentive to her surroundings to avoid possible danger during the childbirth process. The dog is, ironically, no different than Julie in terms of vulnerability as it is starving, "frantic" (5) and looking for a safe place to take refuge in the rain. Having acknowledged the friendly presence of the dog and its companionship, Julie deals with the heat and pain in her body prior to childbirth. Just like pregnancy—revealing fertility and motherhood on the one hand, and posing a social threat on the other—giving birth is a paradoxical experience. For Julie the expansion and contraction of childbirth is not only painful but also distressing due to the deplorable conditions in the shed—without a human companion to support her but a stray dog, without medical help and hygiene. It

is also an act of creation—a process of producing her baby and achieving self-awareness of her bodily and mental strength. Julie constitutes herself through her embedded performance during the childbirth process as she intuitively and intimately comprehends the life within her body. By making room for her baby and waiting for its formation, she experiences thinking through her body. Hence, during the childbirth ritual in isolation, Julie reconsiders her thoughts about her body and unborn baby within "the stratum of matrixial trans-subjectivity" (Ettinger, "Matrixial Trans-subjectivity" 218). That is, what determines Julie's connection with her body and the baby is not the parameters of the phallocentric order bounded by dualistic thinking, designating woman-female body as the other but the feminine dimension, the unconscious sphere, where the mother and the baby develop through a compassionate encounter.

In the second phase of her ritual when the hour of childbirth draws near, Julie focuses on her bodily movements to identify the most comfortable birth position. The outside world now becomes insignificant and worthless for her because she suffers extreme pain. Her body becomes the only physical and psychic space that matters. At the corner of the shed, Julie is "on all fours on the blanket, her head between her arms, her fists clenched tight" (Lessing 6). She has "her bottom up in the air" though not certain about the correctness of the position, then squats "her back against a cold brick wall" (7). Physically, this may describe her body's turning back to its primal position, the expansion of her cervix at the prenatal stage, in which case the act of childbirth can be seen as a series of movements developing between contraction and expansion. She feels spams of pain and bodily rhythms as part of a wave of life going through her body and lets go of these forces without an effort to control. In Ettinger's terms, Julie undergoes a matrixial experience. As Bornemark reveals "[i]n this stream of life there are no clear borders between different senses" (258), and likewise, what Julie senses as pain, heat, spasm, movement inside her body seems to be entwined with what she perceives outside her body. In addition to her sensitivity, her bodily movements might show a bearing body, yet she is not merely one; rather, she is a "subject-to-be" in the process of becoming a mother and "co-becoming with the *unknown* other" (Pollock, "Thinking the Feminine" 26) (emphasis mine). Julie and her baby share the feminine psychic sphere and cohabit the embodied matrixial borderspace transforming them as partial subjects and partial objects. Their co-becoming does not include a union as they are not one and does not include a separation as they are not two. There is no assimilation and no rejection in the hour of birth but co-emergence. Hence, Julie's bodily movements show her fragmenting and fusing subjectivity within the matrix as it evokes the painful process of reconstructing subjectivity through bearing her baby.

At the moment of childbirth, which is intertwined with the previous phase, Julie is in the center as a moving, feeling, sensing and knowing body-self. While changing her bodily position from a quadruped animal to a primate to identify the most appropriate and comfortable one, Julie's body and mind are occupied by confusing sensations. Regarding her body, she senses "sweating and moaning," "water and blood" and "a rush, as if her insides [are] pouring out" (Lessing 7). When she thinks about the external world, she feels "panic" and is scared because of the darkness in the shed and the possibility of being noticed by someone outside. Under such circumstances, Julie represses her need of crying to a certain extent, groaning, thinking about Debbie and her promises, and suffers from loneliness. This clarifies how the childbirth experience takes place both inside and outside of her body causing her to feel a whirl of sensations on physical, mental, and emotional levels. Meanwhile, there are few references to outside measurements like the regulations in the book that objectify the lived experience of the maternal body and do not match the lived experience of birthing. Instead, Julie, the I, appears as an active pregnant woman strongly embodied and empowered. The action and act of labor describes her "metramorphic" experience of giving birth and attaining a heightened level of consciousness about her physical capacity and mental reformation. Given that birth is an overwhelming experience, Julie becomes self-assured

because she feels herself as the producer of her baby as well as the creator of meaning for both in relation to the principle of shareability of the matrix.

When she meets her baby after childbirth, Julie follows her maternal feelings and instincts. First, the baby is depicted as "a wet slippery lump," "greyish and bloody" one based on Julie's sensations (Lessing 7). While she sees the greyish color of the baby and feels its lubricious skin, Julie attempts to understand why it is "mouthing and pulling its face" (8). With a perplexed state of mind, she decides to have "the cord cut, in case the baby died" (7) though the book recommends waiting, and that shows the signs of a mother's concern for her baby and their bourgeoning connection. The description of the umbilical cord as "a thick twisted rope of flesh, full of life, hot and pulsing in her hand" (7) as well as the baby's "wriggling strength, its warmth, the life..." (8) illustrate how waves of life went through inside her body before birth and continue outside her body after birth. Their relational encounter event within the matrixial trans-subjective stratum enables Julie to discover her capacity for affect and compassion to the unknown other, her baby. In fact, the baby has developed compassion for the mother within the matrixial sphere, what Ettinger calls "primary compassion" and is released through their relational co-emergence within the matrix before birth. The combination of mother-baby compassion is "a *practiced affective encounter-event*" (Ettinger, "From Proto-ethical" 124) (emphasis mine) shaping their connection. With the recognition of her capacity for compassion, Julie explores a variety of maternal feelings. For instance, since the newborn is "greasy and wet" and the book does not guide her about the ways of lifting the newborn, Julie takes responsibility in constructing her relation to the baby. She instinctively covers the newborn with "the bundle of towel" (Lessing 8), holds the baby "close against her" (9) and feels "astonished," "full of pleasure and pride" (8). Ettinger argues that "with compassion… grace, solace, coemergence, besidedness" ("From Proto-ethical" 114) become visible, and the mother-baby relation as encounter event continues. Thus, her becoming a mother and the experience of this process anticipates Ettinger's matrixial trans-subjectivity, which, however, remains incomplete as Julie has to leave her baby before going back to the family house.

Implications of Julie's Transformed Subjectivity: Family House

After cutting the cord and embracing the baby, pulsated with strong feelings, Julie names the baby's gender as "a girl" and makes sure she is "perfectly all right" (Lessing 8). On the one hand, her utterance of the baby's gender shows how Julie acts in accordance with the social constructions of the patriarchy essential in identity formation. On the other hand, it suggests the transference from the matrixial subjectivization of the baby emerged in the intrauterine life to its formation as a product of phallic stratification because the former "does not replace the phallus; it operates along a different unconscious track" (Ettinger, "Matrixial Trans-subjectivity" 220) and adds to subjectivity formation in the symbolic order. However, it does not mean that the phallic dimension has the last say in subjectivity; rather, the two levels—the feminine and the phallic—work together. As Pollock argues, "Ettinger's transformative formulation of a matrixial dimension of *subjectivity-as-encounter* supplements, and therefore shifts, the classical psychoanalytical model of a solely postnatal and Oedipal constitution that can be defined as *subjectivity-as-separation*" ("Looking back" n.p.) (emphasis original). Thus, Julie and her baby's co-emergence and co-affection within the matrixial sphere in the prenatal and natal period render the baby's first steps in trans-subjectivity before its gender. As Ettinger claims, "the matrixial-feminine difference emerges neither as 'essential' or biological nor as a social construct of gender. In the feminine, a trans-subjective figure is interlaced. It transgresses individual boundaries and is spread in the several; it is a weaving of affective and mental strings ("Matrixial Trans-subjectivity" 219). Namely, Julie reconstructs her subjectivity through co-becoming with her baby in the matrixial borderlinking and the baby enters into the social order as a potential trans-subjective figure, who is then attributed phallic meanings. Hence,

what Julie experiences in the shed—the solitary act of childbirth and the gradual connection with her baby within the matrixial space—can be associated with a hope for a fresh start. In relation to the psychological impact of childbirth on the pregnant woman, Birksted-Breen states that, "[t]his experience will either confirm the goodness of her body, her loving and creative capacity, her right to have a baby; or, on the contrary, it will reinforce a sense of failure, badness and abandon, and the phantasy that she deserved to be punished as she had feared in pregnancy" (23). For Julie, despite all her fears of pregnancy and parental repression, it occurs in the former way as she feels pride and satisfaction with herself in becoming a mother.

Ready to settle her parents' concerns about her absence, Julie, nonetheless, has to deal with them first by turning back to the family house where she needs to stay until making up her mind and getting back her strength. For this she leaves her baby in a telephone box. From that moment onwards Julie feels pity and watches her baby safely taken to a hospital by a couple. Both the telephone box and the hospital are liminal spaces which render the baby's transition from the matrix to the symbolic order. Julie feels some relief; though she is overwhelmed by feelings like loss, emptiness and bitterness (Lessing 11). This shows a young mother's unintentional choice of abandoning her baby temporarily. Julie, on her way home, with a fresh face and shining eyes, "vibrated with confidence, with secrets" (12), and was invigorated by the rain making her feel reborn. In the postliminal stage of Julie's homecoming, she is completely a different person in a state that promotes reconstruction of subjectivity based on her maternal experience. Unlike her mother and Auntie, whose subjectivity have been solely shaped by the society, Julie has a chance to rebuild her sense of subjectivity in new ways.

Julie's view of her parents and the family house is no longer the same. Her father, for instance, used to be an authority figure who she was afraid of but now Julie sees him as an old man who "had shrunk and become grey and ordinary" (13). Her mother, as usual, remains submissive by her tears and keeps her silence despite her anxiety and suffering through Julie's absence, yet now Julie lacks sympathy for her. When she sees her bedroom "all pretty and pink," her big panda sitting on her pillow, and particularly her old pyjamas, she thinks they are "childish" (15). Despite her need "to cry and cry, and be comforted and held..." (24) by her parents, she keeps her maternal experience to herself since she knows that it would be a futile attempt. Julie's recognition of her changed feelings and thoughts about not only her parents and the family house but also herself reveals her transformation from an innocent adolescent to a mature woman. When Julie notices the news on TV of her baby whom the nurses named as "Rosie," she feels "[h]ot waves of jealousy" (22), which urges her to recall her performative role from the beginning of pregnancy until the end of childbirth: "I've lived in Debbie's flat, and I didn't let myself get hurt by them. I was clever, no one knew I was pregnant, only Debbie. I had Rosie by myself in that shed with only a dog to help me, and then I put Rosie in a safe place and now she's all right, and I've come home, and I've managed it all so well they never even guessed. I'm all right" (25).

Here, Julie retrieves two momentous events of her life experienced at the threshold: in the former, she is proud to be concealing her pregnancy and protecting herself from the baddies in Debbie's flat and in the latter, she manages birthing under inconvenient conditions, assures Rosie's safety and handles her parents. Having demonstrated herself, Julie opts for having Rosie back and starting a new life with her although she has a choice of staying home. "I can do anything I want to do, I've proved that" Julie says (25). The story's open ending, in which Julie drifts off to sleep confidently, suggests a conscious attitude to motherhood. She appears to regress to patriarchal challenges by turning back home or to a postliminal phase where a new sense of subjectivity in relation to her parents needs to take place as Julie, herself, becomes a mother. Julie's success in giving birth to her baby in secret and subsequent feelings of pleasure, pride and compassion are her triumph and mastery of her body and maternal experience; however, how she will construct a new female subjectivity without the repression of her parents remains ambiguous.

Conclusions

Thus, Lessing's "Debbie and Julie" exhibits a controversial female character who foregrounds the difficulty of giving consent to the naturalized body and subject definitions, and so problematizes patriarchal representations of female subjectivity. By giving voice to an innocent teenage girl who is exploring her subjectivity, Lessing poses critical questions concerning the phallogocentric understanding of the female subject and the female body. Pregnant Julie finds herself on the edge of a vital decision—whether to reveal her pregnancy to her parents and stay home or take chances to find alternative ways of her liminal position. It is obvious that her escape shows fears of parental authority as she does not confront the patriarchy but keeps her pregnancy secret. However, the way Julie overcomes all difficulties throughout the whole maternal process reveals her struggle to handle the conflict between female docility framed by the patriarchy and self-determination to individual experiences and preferences. Having observed her mother and Auntie in the family house as the embodiment of social order, as well as Debbie and the other prostitutes in Debbie's flat as the marginalized subjects, Julie acts as the sole agency of her body and subjectivity. Her maternal experience throughout pregnancy and childbirth within the liminality of Debbie's flat and the shed attests that the determination of one's subjectivity is a debatable issue, contrary to what the dominant essentialist discourse imposes. That is, what determines a young girl's perception of her body and subjectivity is not coherent but multifaceted, which undermines the phallic understanding of female subjectivity. Therefore, Julie's maternal experience calls for a reconsideration of the female body and subjectivization manipulated by male authority. Julie's experience of corporeal and mental transformation during the solitary act of childbirth leads to shifts in her self-perception, as her body metamorphoses from a little girl to a young woman, then from a matrixial state of co-emergence with her baby to a potential new female subjectivity. "Debbie and Julie" is thence an outstanding text laying the ground for Ettinger's "Matrixial Theory," which, as Pollock argues, "proposes a forming of subjective elements that predates the formation of what we now understand as gendered subjection/subjectivization" ("Introduction" 6).

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Author:
Dr. Özge ÜSTÜNDAĞ GÜVENÇ is an Assistant Professor in the Department of English Language and Literature at Çankaya University, Turkey. She is interested in topics related to the body, gender, subjectivity, space/place, environment, and migration. She has published on British and Turkish fiction, Gothic literature, Romantic Poetry and English Literature Teaching. Her latest publications include, "Changes in the Teaching of Literature: A Study of Practices in the English Language and Literature Department at Çankaya University during the COVID-19 Pandemic" as the first author (*Changing English*, 2022), "Transformation of Private Space into Social Space in Doris Lessing's 'Getting off the Altitude'" (*Hacettepe University Journal of Faculty of Letters*, 2022), and the chapter titled, "Mohsin Hamid's *Exit West*: Migrants in the Making through Heterotopias," forthcoming in the compilation *Beyond the Occident: Perspectives on Past, Present and Speculative Future in Fiction, Art, Media, and Film*.

Contact: ozgeguvenc@cankaya.edu.tr

Prachi Ratra
Indian Institute of Technology Kharagpur

Resisting the Colonial Discourse: Interrogating Postcolonial Agency

Abstract: Recent developments demonstrate that the impact of colonialism persists in postcolonial societies and attest to continued neocolonialism. However, postcolonial subjects are full of agency. In this paper, the focus is on tracing postcolonial agency in "The Hunt" by Mahasweta Devi, *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* by Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Micere Githae Mugo, and "Pantomime" by Derek Walcott. This article investigates the coexistence of postcolonialism and neocolonialism in postcolonial societies and underlines the acts of resistance towards it. It looks at texts produced around the same period from different former colonies as an attempt to recognize the uniqueness of each experience and its heterogeneity. "The Hunt" focuses on neo-imperialism and violence as an agency with an emphasis on tribal populations. *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* explores the concept of violence being agential and the act of rewriting one's history as an act of agency. "Pantomime" employs the idea of mimicry and language as an act of resistance against imperialism. This approach is towards a context-specific view of (post)colonialism and challenges the homogenization of the Orient by the Occident. This paper is situated within the framework of postcolonial studies.

Keywords: agency, colonialism, language, postcolonial, resistance, violence.

Introduction

The imperial remains continue to impact the world, which is evident in the United States' demand for control in the face of 9/11 and the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq. The wish to "fill the 'power vacuum' and chaos left by the earlier wave of decolonization" by the United States—as viewed by Alexander Stille in "What Is America's Place in the World Now?" (*New York Times*, 2002) and Andrew J. Bacevich in his *The Imperial Tense: Prospects and Problems of American Empire* (2003), both mentioned in Ania Loomba's *Colonialism/Postcolonialism* (2015, page 6)—serves as an example of colonial ideology. The desire for power still exists in the 'First World' countries: the United States was a colony, but it has become an imperial power, according to Jonathan White in his *Recasting the World: Writing after Postcolonialism* (1993), as reviewed by Supriya Nair (146). Terms such as 'First World' and 'Third World' have emerged, continuing the Occident versus Orient dichotomy and intensifying the differences. Thus, the term 'postcolonial' raises complex questions since the word 'post' implies a temporal distance from the colonial period, where the aftereffects of the process of colonization are absent. However, postcolonial subjectivity continues to be shaped by the experiences of its colonial past. Racial distinctions and othering continue to haunt the postcolonial world. The differences between the 'First World' and 'Third World' countries have been accentuated with globalization, whereby the power still lies with the former. The replacement of colonialism by nationalism and neocolonialism continues to challenge the idea of a politically free postcolonial society. However, postcolonial literature poses a challenge to the current hegemonic views that are propagated from the 'First World.'

Postcolonial literature is one "which negotiates with, controls, and subverts Euro-American ideologies and representations... an attempt at the retrieval of local, native, and particular histories" (Nayar, *Postcolonial Literature* 12). It also invokes the question of agency exercised by postcolonial subjects. In the new social history approach, agency is a self-governed action. For Simone Bignall, agency "refers to a bodily

coincidence of desire/power/subjectivity," and the postcolonial society ought to reject "a form of agency that has been complicit with practices of Empire" (13, 1). Agency is also the desire for the recognition "of her... transformation of the given world" (Bignall 38). A colonized individual has faced subjugation, humiliation, and marginalization over long periods, thus leading to her losing faith in her agency as a human being (Nayar, *Dictionary*). Hence, postcolonial literature needs to pose a challenge to the lack of agency of a formerly colonized subject and posit a postcolonial agency that is subversive in nature.

Since this paper cannot explore the experiences of all the former colonies, it engages in an analysis of agency in postcolonial works of literature from Asia (India), East Africa (Kenya), and the Caribbean (Trinidad and Tobago). It does not have a political reason for picking these regions. However, it focuses on the overlapping themes of agency and resistance in the former colonies. By using the word "overlapping," the homogenization of colonial experiences is not intended. However, parallels between the acts of resistance towards a colonial and neocolonial regime are drawn.

"The Hunt" (1995)

"The Hunt" by Mahasweta Devi is set in Kuruda, India. It is the story of Mary Oraon and shows her struggles as the daughter of a tribal woman who was left pregnant by a white man, the master of a timber estate. Her life seemingly goes fine until the entry of Tehsildar Singh. Mr Prasad, Mary's employer, and Tehsildar Singh want to sell Sal trees, which is illegal, and want to exploit the labor of the Oraons for their financial gain. Tehsildar Singh starts lusting after Mary, and she decides to put an end to her exploitation as a woman and her tribe's exploitation in a capitalist society by killing Tehsildar Singh. "The Hunt" deals with people from the Oraon tribe. With the independence of India in 1947, the process of decolonization started. However, nationalism quickly replaced Western imperialism, and tribals continued to suffer. They remained exploited at the hands of the elites of the country. According to Leela Gandhi, postcoloniality is "mediated and accomplished through the discourses and structures of nation-ness" (110) and is a "historical condition marked by the visible apparatus of freedom and the concealed persistence of unfreedom" (7). Andre Gunder Frank's view emphasizes this point, and he believes that the "national bourgeoisie plays a progressive role even after political independence... collaborator in imperialism" (qtd. in I. Kapoor 649). Thus, colonialism has merely been replaced with neocolonialism and exists simultaneously with postcolonialism.

In "The Hunt," Tehsildar Singh tries to capitalize on the hard work of the tribal population. He offers "twelves annas daily for men, eight for women... And a *tiffin* of cornmeal" (Devi 8). With the advent of globalization, the situation for subalterns such as the tribals has worsened. Joseph E. Stiglitz, former Chief Economist at the World Bank, echoes this:

> The international financial institutions have pushed a particular ideology—market fundamentalism—that is both bad economics and bad politics; it is based on premises concerning how markets work that do not hold even for developed countries, much less for developing countries […] globalization itself has been governed in ways that are undemocratic and have been disadvantageous to developing countries, especially the poor within those countries. (qtd. in Loomba 221)

Similarly, a study conducted by the Research Unit for Political Economy in 2003 states that practices managed under globalization have widened the existing economic disparities between the 'First World' and the 'Third World' (qtd. in Loomba 219). Cheryl Naruni Naruk, Sunny Xiang and Shashi Thandra underline that the postcolonial condition is marked by capitalism and wonder if the 'World Bank Literature' can be a synonym for postcolonial studies. Additionally, the state is essential to the growth of capitalism in India (V. Kumar) and threatens the livelihood of the tribal population. It continues the internal colonization of tribals and hints at the lingering effects of colonialism. However, the subalterns possess

agency too. To illustrate this, Ania Loomba provides the example of "resistance to the plunder of the forests in Central India by iron and bauxite mining companies. The movement here is led by Maoist guerrillas who have taken control of large swathes of territory" (254).

The nexus of postcolonialism, neocolonialism, and capitalism is evident in "The Hunt." The tribals have no right over their lands and work for low wages to ensure survival. However, their agency is also brought forth by Devi. When Tehsildar tries to provoke the tribals against Mary, the female protagonist, they ask him to refrain from doing this. The role of the community is highlighted here. Tehsildar understands this and realizes that "everyone has a spear or a machete. He shuts up" (Devi 11). This example is demonstrative of the agency that tribals possess. The agency exercised by Mary's mother as a single mother is highlighted by Devi. Although she was impregnated and left by a white man, she raised Mary alone.

Mary is a subaltern because of her mixed ancestry and gender. She stands at a "criss-cross of colonialism and patriarchy" (Chatterjee 239). However, Devi continuously underlines her agency. Mary refuses to marry the gardener as suggested by the bungalow's mistress and realizes that the mistress did this to "keep her worker captive" (3). She also refuses to indulge the mistress and comments how her brother "wanted only to keep me [Mary]" (5). Mary's refusal to give into other people's manipulations and her decision to marry Jalim mark her agency, whereby she makes independent choices. Devi underlines her efficiency in maintaining the bungalow. Mary also functions as the voice of reason when she tells the Oraon population, "twelve annas and eight annas! No porter carries gentlemen's cases for this price" (9). Her vocalization of the exploitation of the Oraons by Tehsildar endows her with an agency.

Resistance is often envisioned as a woman (Loomba 209). Devi portrays the character of Mary as an embodiment of this resistance. M.N. Chatterjee correlates writing with activism, whereby Devi engages in both via putting forth "the tribal life in India" which is "an 'undiscovered continent' ignored by the mainstream centers of power and existing on the verge of extinction" (239). Similarly, Nair believes writing is a "political transformative act with transnational implications" (145-146). According to Lisa J. Udel, writing serves the purpose of "exposing the reader to the violence of Euroamerican expansion" (62) and aids in giving the reader—who is frequently unaware of such facts—a better understanding of the various ways that Western colonialism has destroyed and continues to destroy Native cultures.

Hence, Devi exerts her postcolonial agency by engaging in writing as activism. She uses writing as a medium to represent the deprived tribals and familiarize the reader with their condition. This familiarization aims to cause a change in the present state of society. Devi also uses the concept of violence as resistance and agency in "The Hunt." Mary exercises her agency through violence. The village is scared of her, and nobody dares to cross her. This fear extends to a point where "no villager has been able to touch the fruit [mahua] even in jest. Mary has instantly raised her machete" (4). Mary has to use violence to protect herself against physical exploitation. When Tehsildar gives her a sari, she threatens him with violence. Mary tells him that "brokers like you... are ten a rupee on the streets of Tohri, and to them I show this machete. Go ask if you don't believe me" (11). She also throws the sari at him and asks him not to "bother me again, I'll cut off your nose" (11). She refuses to submit to Tehsildar and his unwanted advances. Mary utilizes violence to resist patriarchy and colonialism. E.V. Walter postulates that resistance or "expectation of resistance increases the probability of violence" and believes that "modes of resistance, as well as the methods of dealing with it, are ways of exercising power" (251-252). Thus, Mary uses violence as a form of agency. When Tehsildar attempts to rape her, she manipulates him and again engages in violence.

Devi compares Mary to a bloodthirsty animal by stating how "a great thirst dances in her [Mary's] blood" (15). Tehsildar is reduced to a prey whose face starts resembling that of the "hunted animal's" (16). The short story's title becomes fitting when Devi draws the hunter and its prey analogy. Mary "lifts the

machete, lowers it, lifts, lowers" to attack Tehsildar, and this fills her face with "deep satisfaction" (16, 17). The short story ends with the narrator stating that "Mary is not afraid, she fears no animal" (17). Thus, violence liberates Mary from the shackles of a society that seeks to exploit her.

Bina Aggarwal divides violence exercised by women into three categories—covert, overt, and economical (qtd. in Kumar and Yelne 92). Covert refers to violence that is not openly displayed. It can be in the form of "withholding sex from husband to stealing from the family granary" (Kumar and Yelne 92). Overt violence is the one that is openly displayed. By manipulating Tehsildar into seduction and then killing him, Mary engages in both covert and overt violence. Frantz Fanon develops the idea of violence being essential for the colonized subject. He asserts that "the underprivileged... is the exploited who very soon discovers that only violence pays" (23). Here, Mary is the subaltern who needs to use violence to exert her agency. Fanon also defines violence as a "cleansing force" at the individual level (51). Violence is an act of counterpower (Walter 252). *The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* (henceforth *TTDK*) by Ngugi wa Thiong'o and Micere Githae Mugo further explores violence being agential in response to a colonial regime.

***The Trial of Dedan Kimathi* (2015)**

TTDK centers around the Mau Mau uprising in Kenya, a revolutionary movement that united the Kenyans against the Britishers. It highlighted the collective resistance of the natives against the colonizers. Mau Mau is remembered as: "an anticolonial movement that waged a guerrilla war against the British, leading to the declaration of a state of emergency between 1952 and 1960. The Mau Mau war cost the lives of ninety-five Europeans (thirty-two settlers and sixty-three rebels), nearly two thousand Kenyan loyalists, and 11,503 Kenyans identified as rebels. About eighty thousand Mau Mau sympathisers and fighters were detained" (Mwangi 88). Since Mau Mau was an armed movement, it was violent in nature.

Ngugi and Mugo continuously evoke the imagery of violence. For example, "Mau Mau guerillas with machine guns" (6) bring forth the inherent violence underlining the movement. Kimathi states how the natives "demand our [their] freedom" and are ready to "fight" for it (27). The violent nature of this fight is emphasized when Kimathi comments that "we [natives] shall bleed for our soil" (34) and grabs Henderson by the neck. This violence is reflected in the mime that takes place in the play. The dancers perform a "militant dance" (37). The violence examined in *TTDK* acts as an agency against colonization. Fanon foregrounds the importance of violence in decolonization. He believes that the colonized "have been prepared for violence from time immemorial. As soon as they are born it is obvious to them that their cramped world, riddled with taboos, can only be challenged by out and out violence" (3). Hannah Arendt states that "violence can always destroy power" (20), and it is the "only possibility to set the scales of justice right" in certain situations (24).

TTDK employs violence as a tool to fight the imperial power and produce an anti-colonial discourse. Violence can also be seen as a "desperate act of agency" (Nayar, *Dictionary* 5) when the subject has no option but to engage in violence to reinforce her sense of self and her agency. Fanon and Ngugi believed that violence could be agential in producing an anti-colonial society. Jonathan White refers to them as "literary guerrillas" in *Recasting the World: Writing after Colonialism* (qtd. in Nair 146), and their writings posit defiance as a political act.

Resistance in *TTDK* is explored at the individual and collective levels. The songs in the play are songs of resistance. The collective resistance is demonstrated by the "angry procession of defiant blacks, chanting anti-imperialist slogans" (5). The natives act defiantly towards the settlers and their witnessing of Kimathi's trial. Collective resistance is built through everyday actions. At the individual level, resistance is exhibited by Kimathi, the Woman, the Boy, and the Girl. Kimathi is described as a defiant hero who questions the existing colonial power. He calls the court "an imperialist court of law... the law of oppression" (25).

When faced with temptations, Kimathi resists them and asserts that he will never sell his country. In the face of violence and his impending trial, he acts defiantly. This defiance marks his agency. As previously stated, resistance is often feminized. In *TTDK*, the Woman emerges as a significant figure of resistance. She has "defiance in her tone" (9) and resists the mere change from colonialism to neocolonialism. The Woman is instrumental to the Mau Mau revolution. She is representative of all women who were involved in the movement. Her agency lies not only in her defiance but also in her role as a transforming actor.

Change is essential to the conceptualization of agency since social transformation is related to agency (Bignall 1-26). The Woman makes this change. She makes the Boy and the Girl realize the importance of freedom and incorporates them into the revolution. This change is also the change in ranks and is observed when "Kimathi watches the Boy and Girl until they take their seats" (81). Agency, described as "the ability to alter the course of one's life" (Nayar, *Dictionary* 6), is thus possessed by the Woman.

The Boy and the Girl also exhibit resistance and agency. The Girl decides that they must "carry out the plan ourselves... rescue Kimathi" (52). They "simultaneously hold the gun" (84) during the trial. The development of the Boy and the Girl into members of the Mau Mau movement is indicative of theirs and the Woman's agency. Apart from the characters in the play, Ngugi and Mugo exert their postcolonial force by rewriting the history of Kenya from the natives' perspective. This version of history stands in juxtaposition to the colonizers' version of history.

The preface to *TTDK* states the aim of writing this play. According to Ngugi and Mugo, *TTDK* encapsulates the "epic deeds of resistance" and brings forth the "heroic resistance of Kenyan people fighting foreign forces of exploitation and domination" (viii). Ingrid Bjokman asserts that the British used the term Mau Mau for "the Kenyan freedom movement... described it as rash, atavistic, mass-murdering movement, rooted in barbarism and superstition" (qtd. in Okunoye 230).

History is integral to the process of identity formation. History written by the West is biased towards the Orient and tends to dehumanize them. Ngugi and Mugo engage in retelling the history of Kenya through the writing of *TTDK*. Kimathi is elevated from the status of a war guerilla to the stature of a hero. The first soldier comments how Kimathi is "a hero to the people. They love him like anything" (13). The Woman mentions how "Kimathi was never alone... will never be alone. No bullet can kill him" (21). The image of Kimathi as "Great commander... Great organiser... Great fearless fighter" adds to the making of the hero (62). Kimathi, described as a bloodthirsty character in colonial history, is reinvented by Ngugi and Mugo as a hero in their play. The making of Kimathi as a hero is iconic in nature. It captures the imagination of people through myth and miracles. This elevation to the level of a hero is demonstrated in the Woman's speech about Kimathi. The rewriting of anti-colonial history also brings into focus the previously neglected people who fought for independence. The performance of the colonizer's account can shift the focus onto the natives' accounts (Mwangi 90). The importance of knowing one's history is echoed by Kimathi when he remarks:

> We must know our history
> Especially the deeds of those
> Who have always resisted
> The rape of our beautiful Kenya (67).

History is a product of material reality and keeps changing. Historicism is not free from the operating power relations in the world and is "itself grounded in an imperial ontology and theory of desire, and a Eurocentric finality" (Bignall 61). Colonial history tends to obliterate the history of the colonized and their agency in warding off a colonial regime. *TTDK* examines "misconceptions and distortions in official Kenyan history, which marginalizes the popular struggle that culminated in the nation's independence" (Okunoye 225). Ngugi and Mugo retell Kenyan history. Writing is a "political act," and *TTDK* puts "imperialism on

trial" (Basu and Kumar iii). *TTDK* marks the influence of Ngugi and Mugo as writers who bring out transformations in Kenyan society by retelling Kenyan history via their works. Their agency is also put forth through the use of language in *TTDK*.

Ngugi and Mugo incorporate Kenyan words along with English in their writing. They use words from Gikuyu, Kiswahili, and pidgin. This use of language can be termed as abrogation. It refers to the "refusal of the categories of the imperial culture, its aesthetic, its illusory standard of normative or 'correct' usage, and its assumption of a traditional and fixed meaning 'inscribed' in the words" (Ashcroft et al. 37). The use of words such as "uhuru," "ngoja," "mimi," "kuja," "ngai," and "mbuci," disrupts the English narrative and transforms the language into "english" which is a "continuum of 'intersections' in which the speaking habits in various communities have intervened to reconstruct the language" (Ashcroft et al. 39).

Language is a medium of power, and the decision to leave words untranslated is a political choice that attests to the writer's agency. The songs in *TTDK* are in the Kenyan language as well, and the use of the native language is complementary to the play's themes and its anti-colonial discourse. One of the songs in the play translates to:

> We shall grab [back] ('win back')
> Our Land
> We fight for
> Our Freedom
> And we redeem
> Our Education
> We shall grab [back]
> Our Industries
> Our Culture.
> It's our land
> Blood and sweat
> We shed
> To redeem
> Our soil. (R. Kapoor 44)

The reclamation of land is linked to the prioritizing of the native language. Land and its language are inseparable. After conquering a land, ideological control is gained through the imposition of the colonizer's language. By resisting the language of the colonizer, attempts at resisting colonization are made. In *TTDK*, Ngugi and Mugo use the language of their land to retell their history and resist the imperialist discourse. The usage of pidgin further blurs the binary between the colonizer and the colonized. This blurring is achieved by combining standard English with the local language. Thus, language acts as an instrument to exert agency. The agential nature of language is emphasized because the "choice of leaving words untranslated in post-colonial texts is a political act, because while translation is not admissible in itself, glossing gives the translated word, and thus the 'receptor' culture, the higher status" (Ashcroft et al. 65). This political act of leaving words untranslated not only attributes a "higher status" to the native culture but also brings into focus local knowledge systems. This focus on local knowledge can be interpreted as an exercise of agency since it recognizes the native culture, and Bignall conceptualizes agency as the desire for recognition (38).

Local knowledge is also called "subjugated knowledge" and occupies a subordinate position in the hierarchy of what forms the knowledge system (qtd. in Gandhi 43). Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari use the term "minor" knowledge for this local knowledge and explain how these have been "deterritorialised" by the hegemonic discourse (qtd. in Gandhi 43). *TTDK* brings these ideas to the forefront through the

selective use of language. Language becomes political since it is inseparable from culture. Thus, these arguments exemplify the use of language as an agency for postcolonial subjects. This use is not limited to Ngugi and Mugo; it is common to many postcolonial writers. Derek Walcott also uses the agential nature of language in "Pantomime."

"Pantomime" (2008)

"Pantomime" by Derek Walcott is set in Tobago, which was a British colony. Trinidad and Tobago attained independence in 1962 and became a republic in 1976. The colonization of the Caribbean began with Spain, and it became a British colony in 1802. "Pantomime" depicts the relationship between an English hotel owner, Harry Trewe, and his Creole servant, Jackson Phillip. It begins with Trewe rehearsing a play in the hotel lobby, met with reluctance from Jackson, who urges him to prioritize improving the hotel's condition. Trewe tries to persuade Jackson into rehearsing the play with him. However, Jackson refrains from participating, expressing discontent over racial slurs in the play. Eventually, Jackson hijacks the play by portraying Robinson Crusoe and makes Trewe play Friday. Jackson portrays Crusoe as a violent man and compares this act with the violence of colonialism. Through this role reversal, "Pantomime" explores the themes of colonialism, imperialism, identity, and agency in the Caribbean.

Language serves as an imperialist tool and creates a conflict between the native language and the colonizer's language. The replacement of one's native language with the colonizer's language shows the extent to which the colonial experience can prove to be pervasive and how it becomes internalized. However, language can act in favor of the colonized by imbibing them with an agency. Jackson expresses his understanding of colonialism and his antipathy towards it via language when he uses his words to state that "for three hundred years I [blacks] served you [whites] [...] But after a while the child does get frighten of the shadow he make. He say to himself, That is too much obedience, I better hads stop" (Walcott 137). Jackson calls the play rehearsal the "history of imperialism" (140). He has two accents—English and Creole. He alternates between the two accents, which is a conscious choice. It endows him with a sense of selfhood. This notion of selfhood is essential to the performance of agency. Harry realizes that Jackson "mispronounce[s] words on purpose" (144). This comment highlights Jackson's choice to use the language to his benefit and refusal to succumb to the colonizer's language, underlining his agency. Walcott emphasizes the Creolization of English by Jackson, who uses his native language and simultaneously participates in "inventing language" (137). Language, thus, serves as an everyday form of resistance.

Walcott uses words such as "Bohbolee" and "bwana." These words are rooted in the Caribbean community. He uses these words instead of words that would be more suitable for the colonizer. This choice ends up portraying Jackson as a Creolized Crusoe and engaging in what Lashley sees as a: "subversion of language [...] of the entire system of cultural assumptions on which the texts of the English canon are based and the whole discourse of metropolitan control within which they were able to be imposed" (qtd. in Ashcroft et al. 47). In this context, language can be viewed as a social action entwined with power.

Walcott refuses to engage in the "symbolic violence" caused by unbalanced power relations between the colonizer and the colonized. Pierre Bourdieu states that symbolic violence "occurs when individuals mistakenly consider a standard dialect or style of speaking to be truly superior to the way they themselves speak, rather than an arbitrary difference afforded social significance" (qtd. in Ahearn 111). By presenting the Creolized English, Walcott exercises his choice of select native words and refrains from privileging the colonizer's language over the native language. This selection of words can be perceived as a form of postcolonial agency. "Pantomime" makes use of the concept of mimicry to display postcolonial agency.

Mimicry is a form of agency in postcolonial studies. It is a subversive tool, and a "resistance strategy" since the "crucial characteristic of colonial identity that is captured through mimicry is *absence* of fixed

identity, and the mimed reflection of this absence thus collapses the self-certainty associated with colonial authority" (Bignall 74, emphasis original). For Homi Bhabha, mimicry refers to the adoption of the mannerisms of the colonizer by the colonized subjects. It is a form of power exercised over the colonized. However, it forces "slippage" (126), enabling mimicry to become a subversive tool. "Pantomime" employs this idea of mimicry as resistance and agency in Jackson's portrayal. His defiance is evident as the mimicry carries on. Although he feigns indifference to the role reversal, Jackson seizes it as an opportunity to mock colonialism and its prejudices. Harry remarks that "pretending indifference to this game [...] but you've manipulated it your way" (147). Utilizing the act of imitation, Jackson takes control of the play and makes Harry the "white cannibal" (134). This reversal challenges the idea of the blacks as uncivilized. It destabilizes the characteristics that mark the white identity.

Walcott also questions the notion of religion. The civilizing mission was based on the premise that the white man is providing the black man with religion to save his soul. However, the black man faced exploitation at the hands of the white. Walcott brings into question the true reason behind the civilizing mission. This interrogation, where Jackson questions the motives of Harry and addresses him as a cannibal, not only subverts the colonizer-colonized relationship but also blurs this distinction. This blurring is an act of agency on Walcott's part, whereby he interrogates the history propagated by the colonizer. "Pantomime" also brings forth the idea of parroting or mimicry through the figure of Harry's parrot and its use of racial slurs. Jackson kills the parrot. This killing acts as a trope for the killing of colonial culture and its accompanying prejudices. He expresses no regret over the killing and mocks Harry by stating that the parrot "choke[d] from prejudice" (148). Jackson, thus, uses the space for imitation and mimicry to exercise his agency. Mimicry and its practices "emerge as one of the most elusive and effective strategies" to exert power (Bhabha 126). "Pantomime" employs the story of Robinson Crusoe. It destabilizes the meanings attached to the terms colonizer and colonized. In Daniel Defoe's story, Crusoe acts as a settler who taught language and religion to Friday. This colonizer-colonized relationship is blurred and subverted by Walcott to disassemble the Occident versus Orient binary. The play opens with Harry's conception of himself as a Crusoe-like figure:

> Just picture a lonely island
> and a beach with its golden sand.
> There walks a single man
> in the beautiful West Indies! (132)

When Jackson appears with his breakfast, Harry calls him Friday. However, Harry decides to bring a twist to the story. He makes Jackson, the servant, a master, and himself Friday because of Jackson's refusal to play Friday. This rendition of the story of Robinson Crusoe is an entertaining factor for Harry. However, Jackson is aware of the political implications of a black man playing the character of Crusoe. His opposition to this scheme is clear when Jackson refuses to be a part of it. This refusal is an act of defiance on Jackson's part against the white man. Walcott, here, blurs the distinction between the colonizer and the colonized. He achieves this by the interchange of the roles of Crusoe and Friday between Harry and Jackson. Walcott presents another version of *Robinson Crusoe.* In it, he envisions the relationship between Crusoe and Friday mediated by slavery. Jackson states that "I want to tell you 'bout Robinson Crusoe. He tell Friday, when I do so, do so. Whatever I do, you must do like me... That was the first example of slavery, 'Cause I am still Friday and you ain't me" (138). This statement shows that Jackson is aware of his position as a colonized subject who cannot become a master even in a farce that Harry seeks to recreate. The character of Robinson Crusoe also occurs in other works by Walcott. In "The Figure of Crusoe,'' Walcott posits Crusoe as an ancestor who was a co-creator of Caribbean society along with Friday. This conceptualization imbibes Walcott with a postcolonial agency where he has the power to subvert the popular version written by a

white man and investigate the stereotypical roles through a comical recital of the story. Through the course of this comical examination, Jackson is continuously given more rationality and power over Harry by Walcott.

Conclusions

The works discussed in this paper address the common theme of resistance and agency in select postcolonial literature. These works also bring forth the heterogeneous identities of the postcolonial subjects. The idea of native identity is a form of postcolonial agency as well. As Simon During argues, "the post-colonial desire is the desire of decolonised communities for an identity" (qtd. in Bignall 71). Agency is considered as the desire for recognition. It is critical to note the constant acts of resistance in response to colonialism and its official history. These acts are practiced continuously.

According to Elleke Boehmer, "the struggle for selfhood [...] depends, not on discursive play but on a day to day lived resistance, a struggle for meanings which is in the world as well as on paper" (qtd. in Gandhi 159). The sense of selfhood is integral to agency. Thus, this view propagated by Boehmer posits a duality of the postcolonial agency. This duality is on the level of everyday resistance executed by natives against colonialism and neocolonialism and the resistance performed by writers. Through the course of the paper, the idea of writing as a political act has been established.

This notion of writing underlines the role of postcolonial literature in challenging the Western discourse. Postcolonial literature is "devoted to undoing the representations of native cultures within colonial texts because it is argued that the power, authority and right to represent one's own culture is a marker of sovereignty" (Nayar, *Dictionary* 133). The very idea of sovereignty invokes agency and subverts the claim that postcolonial subjects are devoid of agency. This invocation of agency transforms a body composed of dominated forces into a body constituted of dominating forces (Deleuze, as qtd. in Bignall 132), thus negating the distinction between the colonizer and the colonized. This negation is political in nature. As Diana Coole writes, "To invoke negativity is thus to exhort political intervention while already performing a political act: it destabilizes illusions of perfection, presence and permanence by associating the positive with petrified and illegitimate structures of power" (qtd. in Bignall 31).

Postcolonial agency lies not only in subverting the colonial discourse but also the nationalist discourse. Postcoloniality is "mediated and accomplished through the discourses and structures of nation-ness" (Gandhi 110). Devi exemplifies this view in "The Hunt." The Oraon population exists in a state of poverty and continues to be exploited. The difference is that their countrymen, instead of the Britishers, now exploit them. This state of the nation is postcolonial as well as neocolonial. Pramod K. Nayar states, "the politically independent nations (former colonies) rarely have economic independence. Their economic policies are usually subject to scrutiny and even pressure by First World nations or supranational organizations […]" (*Dictionary* 115). Thus, the coexistence of postcolonialism with neocolonialism is explored in the postcolonial literature discussed in the paper. Ngugi and Mugo also present this state of Kenya through Kimathi's temptation in the form of neocolonialists. Walcott touches upon neocolonialism; this is demonstrated when Jackson tells Harry that the colonists have returned to their country, but the Caribbean remains the same. The exposure and critique of this sort of nation-ness is a political act intended to transform society. The ability to bring out a reform in the country can be interpreted as the agency exercised by writers.

Walcott, Ngugi and Mugo, and Devi utilize imperial tools to subvert colonial discourse. Mimicry acted as an instrument to control the colonized, where they aspired to be like the colonizer—imitating a culture that is not one's own led to the corrosion of the native identity. This imitation furthered the spread of colonialism. However, Walcott uses the concept of mimicry to blur the boundaries between the West and

the East. Mimicry also serves to negate this dichotomy. He also uses the famous story of *Robinson Crusoe,* a part of the English canon, to interrogate the problematic nature of 'othering' someone based on their race. Walcott in "Pantomime" also highlights language and its importance in exercising agency for postcolonial subjects. Ngugi and Mugo emphasize the significance of language as a form of agency. They make use of the local language and incorporate it into standard English. The songs of resistance in the play are in the languages of Kenya. Ngugi and Mugo refuse to adhere to the conventions of the colonizer's language. They retell the history of Kenya. This history contests the historiography propagated by the Britishers. *TTDK* expresses the postcolonial agency through its refusal to be assimilated into the colonizer's language and discourse. It also underlines the notion of the agential nature of violence. Devi also demonstrates how resorting to violence can be considered as an agency. "The Hunt" rejects both neocolonialism and nationalism. It aims to endow the tribals with a subaltern agency. Thus, this paper focuses on the overlapping concerns in the texts discussed in relation to the conceptualization of agency.

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Author:

Prachi RATRA is a Research Scholar pursuing a Ph.D. from the Indian Institute of Technology, Kharagpur. Her research focuses on Partition 1947 and addresses its implications for the Bannu community; she is fascinated by the juxtaposition between memory and archived Partition history.

Contact: prachir13@gmail.com

Tetyana Ostapchuk
University College London

Memory, Identity, and Belonging in Yuriy Tarnawsky's Autobiographical Novel *Warm Arctic Nights*

Abstract: The paper deals with memory, identity, and belonging issues in the autobiographical novel *Warm Arctic Nights* by a distinguished Ukrainian American writer, Yuriy Tarnawsky. The novel shares the story of a youth whose life was disrupted by the turmoil of World War II in the Polish-Ukrainian borderlands. The analysis aims to establish a connection between identity formation through narration and changing functions of the borders, from reliable and well-protected toward violated and porous ones. Thus, the novel is re-read through the analytical lenses of identity and border poetics. The analysis stems from the concepts of "biographical me" and "identity set" suggested by Neil MacKinnon and David Heise (2010). The paper revises the personal and collective identities of the protagonist, images of Others, and topographical, symbolic, and epistemological borders inside and outside the text. The author of the paper places Ukrainian migrants' experience of trauma, loss, and displacement into a broader context of border crossings in times of war.

Keywords: autobiography, border crossing, memory, identity, Ukrainian migrants.

Introduction

Yuriy Tarnawsky is one of the most prominent poets and writers of the Ukrainian American diaspora of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries. He was born in Ukraine in 1934 and fled the country during World War II. Tarnawsky spent his young adult years in a Displaced Persons (DP) camp in Germany. In 1952 he moved to the U.S., where he graduated with a degree in engineering and began working for the IBM Corporation. Tarnawsky made a foray into writing as a poet, then as a translator, critic, prose writer, and playwright. Today he is one of the major players in the Ukrainian cultural field. In continental Ukrainian literature, Tarnawsky is widely respected as "the most radical and experimental daring poet among members of the New York Group" (Rewakowicz xviii), who has made significant contributions to the modernization of the Ukrainian poetic language. In the West, Tarnawsky is best known as a writer with a unique English prose style, most of his works having been issued by experimental publishing houses in the U.S.

Today, when millions of Ukrainians have been forced to flee their country because of the Russo-Ukrainian War, the experiences of people who passed through DP camps after World War II are topical as never before. Tarnawsky's autobiographical novel *Warm Arctic Nights* (2019) is timely and fit to be read through the analytical lenses of identity and border poetics. These particular approaches deserve revisiting because they resonate both with Tarnawsky's prose and with Ukrainian national identity construction at the present time.

Memories and Identity Sets

Prior to the publication of *Warm Arctic Nights,* Tarnawsky wrote several texts based on personal memories and biography. We find allusions to his life in his novels *Meningitis* and *Roads*, the poems

"Spomyny" ("Memories") and "Ankety" ("Questionnaires"), and a fictionalized autobiography entitled *Bosonizh dodomu i nazad (Barefoot Home and Back*). In a 2022 interview about his writing with George Salis, the founder of the fiction podcast *The Collidescope*, Tarnawsky explains that there is "virtually no raw autobiographical data in my writing, all of it deals with subjects and themes that occupy me and which have been stirred up by the events in my life. I am a very private person and feel uncomfortable disclosing to others the details of my biography" (n.p.).

So, it will come as no surprise that the process of writing his autobiographical novel *Warm Arctic Nights* took Tarnawsky approximately thirty years. This brings to light the dialectical process of wishing to transform, silence, forget, or erase intimate and often traumatic moments from the past and needing to embrace their importance, so as to form the conceptual structure of the Self. Narrating an identity becomes an endless process of negotiating different selves, meanings, contesting memories, and competing cultural spaces that outline the ideas of belonging. In this paper I refer mainly to this discursive understanding of identity. As Katka Reszke acknowledges, "Narrative is therefore a necessary means of appreciating meanings in an individual's life" (80).

Tarnawsky has demonstrated this theoretical claim many times in his interviews, for example: "I write because I need to express myself, because I fight with my inner demons, the dragons of my life, on the pages of my manuscripts. I do it as if proving a theorem, and I want to find the simplest and most elegant way to do it" (Dobush, n.p.). Or: "For me, writing is a highly personal endeavor, an existential act, through which I am able to be myself—I write, therefore I am" (Salis, n.p.).

For decades, Tarnawsky repeatedly returned to his idea but could not proceed because of real facts that "prevented the imagination from working in full capacity. It was very disturbing, because I felt a deep psychological need to lay down on paper the first ten and a half years of my life mainly because the final four of them had been especially traumatic" (Mymruk, n.p.).

Until a story is finished, the main character's "biographical me" can be seen as one of many possible writer's identities that remain subject to revision. Neil MacKinnon and David Heise interpret the "biographical me" as "constructed as a narrative integration of memorable elements in the individual's identity set" (103). And:

> The identity set contains everything—public and private, desired and undesired, salient and unimportant. It comprises all past experiences and identities that have settled in memory as appreciations of self, even those that have been "forgotten" [...]. The identity set is ever-evolving, incorporating newly acquired role-experiences and identities, and losing identities that no longer can be deployed. (102)

In the fall of 2017, Tarnawsky was finally able to proceed with his project, one that reflects his deep reliance on specific, imagistic memories. He started to interview himself; *Warm Arctic Nights* is thus written in the form of questions and answers. In his review of Tarnawsky's novel, Stash Luczkiw underlines the novel's idiosyncratic narrative form: "The novel is recounted in the form of a questionnaire, as if the narrator is reluctant to tell his story and needs to be prodded into revealing scattered details that seem to well up spontaneously from his memory" (Luczkiw, n.p.).

Approaches to Writing and Reading the Novel

Although Tarnawsky's writing style in this novel can hardly be called experimental—it is, instead, unadorned, descriptive, and static—the narrative has a very complex structure. The writer makes sense of his identity while retelling stories of his childhood. From the narrative point of view, there are several voices in the text forming a polyphony rather than ordinary dialogue. The voice of the narrator who asks questions is that of an interviewer, an historian, or a researcher digging into the past, extracting "forgotten" memories, and striving to integrate his narrative. The voice of the interviewee is a combination

of at least two different identity sets: a young boy who is simultaneously a narrator, protagonist, and storyteller; and an aged writer who answers his own questions while he rereads, rediscovers, and re-writes his life, looking back at himself as the young boy. In a certain sense, the high level of self-reflexivity apparent in the novel positions it as metafiction, inasmuch as it employs auto- or intertextual allusions, creates biographies of imaginary writers, and presents and discusses the works of imaginary characters. Moreover, while involving himself with these characters, the author connects history with fiction. He questions absolute truth and knowledge about the past. He opens a kind of time tunnel and, in doing so, he rediscovers the stories of Ukrainian Displaced Persons of the 1940s, and writes them into a wider discussion on displacement and migration at the beginning of the twenty-first century.

The plot of *Warm Arctic Nights* consists of a series of logically and chronologically related events of a young boy's life in pre-World War II Poland, in war-torn Ukraine, and on his way to the West. The story is divided into three parts. Part One is devoted to episodic memories of the sweet childhood of a boy who lives with his family in a beautiful manor on the Polish-Ukrainian borderland. Part Two recounts the horrors of World War II; and Part Three, which reveals the details of the boy's escape from the German-occupied territories, and features a symbolic, open-ended finale in which the boy misses his train and remains stranded in a strange town. Each part is divided into fifteen chapters consisting of a number of questions, which are rooted in chronological but also associative connections, and detailed answers. In interviews that took place during the launch of the novel at the 2019 Lviv Book Forum and later, in 2020, the author advocated for the genre of fictionalized autobiography because his novel is

> autobiography to 80-90%, as I made profound shifts in chronology and characters, and though detailed scenes come entirely from my imagination, they are always 100% true to life in their essence. But all of the atrocities and deaths in the novel are precisely described as they happened in reality. I implemented these changes with an aim to create a more influential story, to impress a reader in a more effective way. (Mymruk, n.p.)

In addition to the author's unstoppable wish to interpret and reinterpret strategies of self-reflexivity even after the book was published, there is another intriguing aspect to this quote: the writer's desire to impress the reader. Thus, Tarnawsky's implied reader becomes a listener, a witness, a partner in a conversation about the past, and is the field on which the narrative strategies are projected. This proves, first of all, that the narrative search for identity is never finished because it will be repeated as many times as readers of different generations, backgrounds, nationalities, will read the text. Second, the process of identification is questionable in isolation because any identity is always being constructed via the principle of difference in relation to someone or something else: either personal identity in relation to the Other; or group, collective, and national identity in relation to other groups, collectives, or nations. Tarnawsky's autobiographical novel thus depicts how the narrator's identity has been constructed through the principle of difference in relation to dominant cultural identities that have been changed during his lifespan.

Another methodological approach that might give us a deeper understanding of memory, identity, and belonging in Tarnawsky's text is suggested by border poetics (Schimanski and Wolfe). I tend to interpret his writing as a border-crossing narrative that connects individual experience of the border with larger historical narratives. The young protagonist stands in for the border crosser; narrative situations represent different territories; the antagonist represents the border or associated border agents (war, advances of enemy armies); and the helpers are those who allow the protagonist to cross. There are also numerous border structures (bridges, rivers, train stations) that regulate the border-crossing narrative of *Warm Arctic Nights.*

Borders in and outside the Novel

"Warm," the first part of the novel, begins with the question, "How was the room?" which immediately transports the reader into the cozy space of a child's room. The writer uses the rhetorical device of synesthesia, introducing sensory triggers that create an interplay among the reader's senses. Colors, smells, and tactile senses are featured in such descriptions as, "the rose and honey light of a kerosene lamp," "walls looking like rows of tall men dressed in long black robes," "warm water," "light brown from the oak bark," "mint [...] fresh smell accompanied me to the cozy world of my bed," "a big soft moss-green tufted sofa," "a dark green velvet cloth" (3). The compactness of the room is intensified by the presence of even smaller and more claustrophobic spaces within it: the zinc tub for bathing, bed, sofa, wardrobe, the space under the table cloth where the boy loves to hide and dream. "[Y]ou lived in a small world there, different from the real one. [...] I would curl into a ball, close my eyes, and let things happen as they wanted. It was like living a different life" (30).

The boy's life is delightful and controlled by his wishes and imagination; life is safe and filled with small, magical creatures, such as gnomes, who control and stop time to fight with a huge black dragon. The storyteller then confesses that "Being out in the open interfered with my thinking but being hemmed in made me free" (30). This statement reveals the boy's initial desire to stay within known, comfortable borders and his unwillingness to cross them. It also creates a spatial frame that contrasts with the finale of the story, where the boy is left alone in a vast, empty land: "The train was gone. I could still see it, though, on the track, way in the distance, getting smaller and smaller, as if trying to turn into the vanishing point in a perspective drawing. The land was flat and empty on both sides of it, with a huge empty sky above. I looked around and didn't see anybody. All the people who were trying to get onto the train had made it. I was alone" (226).

In between these extreme spaces, which present the very first memory that the protagonist has about his childhood and the moment when he finds himself utterly alone, the narrator creates numerous narrative situations that push the protagonist beyond known borders: topographical, symbolic, and epistemological. Gradually, the outlines of the boy's room expand into the house in which his family lives, then the manor estate where their house is located, a town situated on two rivers, his grandmother's house in the mountains, a house on the seashore, and other people's houses. With each such expansion the character's Self and his personal identity are crystallizing. The episode in which he decides to sleep outside is a remarkable one because it shows the boy's readiness to embrace discomfort, loneliness, and fears. The whole scene concludes symbolically with a severe bout of pneumonia; this illness is the result of the character's colliding not just with nature, but also with a vast, open, and unprotected space.

The text contains numerous comments from the mature narrator and his present-day re-evaluation of previous deeds, suggesting that such moments may be regarded as phases of initiation or preparation for imminent challenges: "If I persisted, there'd be nothing I wouldn't be able to withstand when it finally came" (27-28). Thus, the two narrators' voices are blended, dissolving the temporal borders within the text.

Moreover, all the narrative voices sound in unison in their wish to reverse time or to freeze it during the most pleasurable moments in the first part of the book. Temporal and symbolic borders in the narrative also intersect in a specific way on the threshold of the boy's memories about his real experiences and his passion for reading to the extent that the border between the two is in the process of disappearing completely. The books that the boy reads become his fortune tellers, sources of inspiration, supporters, and helpers in the challenges he has to withstand.

Searching for his personal identity, the boy encounters numerous challenges, sometimes natural ones, at other times ones that he creates for himself. Thus, he invents an imaginary brother, to whom he sends toys by the river; he cuts his sister's doll into pieces because he wants to see what is inside; he encounters

a girl named Karolina and discovers facts about the female anatomy. The more challenges he withstands the better he embraces his physical body and his personality. His memories of encountering new people in often strange places under peculiar circumstances are crucial in expanding the epistemological borders of his unformed mind.

The text contains several stories in which the line between the real and the imaginary is seemingly blurred. One of them is the boy's visit to the circus and his utter obsession with a family of acrobats. The detailed descriptions of these performers seem to serve as a self-explanatory comment to Tarnawsky's later works in which the image of acrobats is emblematic. With the acrobat father at the bottom of the human pyramid, his entire family on his shoulders, this image also conveys the author's androcentric idea that the husband-father is responsible for the welfare of his family. During his visit to the circus, the boy is also mesmerized by a small, white, dwarf elephant that is able to count and offers the boy and his mother tea, pouring it from a teapot held firmly by its trunk. In another incident, the boy watches two men carrying a wardrobe into the sea until they disappear, together with their burden.

Tarnawsky intensifies his storytelling strategy with magical twists. For example, one of the characters, Pan Florian the village postmaster, is fighting with a ghost that wants to inhabit his body; Pan Florian once turned a dog into a pile of sand; he can make things fly in the air; he speaks a strange language to calm down spooky knocking, the clanking of a metal chain, and other noises. The erasure of the border between reality and imagination peaks in the frequent descriptions of dreams, which are a recognizable feature of the author's individual style in general. In one of his interviews, the writer acknowledges that "imagination is so much more powerful than everyday life; compare the incredible—scary or exhilarating—experiences we live through in our dreams at night, to the drab events we trudge through in the daytime. It is for this reason I frequently turn to dreams in my writing. They enable me to create more effective works, with greater impact on the reader" (Salis, n.p.).

This greater impact is created in a dream that the boy has after the death of Countess Apolinaria, wife of the manor owner; this is the first time that the protagonist witnesses death. In his dream, the family is eating dinner at the table on which the dead body is stretched out. They are eating raw meat and smearing blood over their faces, but everyone is doing this with joy and gusto, except the boy, who feels enormous disgust and nausea but cannot disobey his father's prodding. The dream foreshadows the boy's future, numerous encounters with death, suffering, and loss—and their inevitability.

The images of the father and mother deserve a closer look. The formation and liberation of the narrator's Self include elements of rivalry with the father and adoration of the mother. These relationships develop and change throughout the novel; they also cross textual borders, as attested by Tarnawsky's dedication to his father: "To the memory of my father who loved me more than anyone else." This homage connects the fictionalized biography with the present-day reality of the writer's life.

The elements of color that are used in the description of the two parents help the reader to visualize the protagonist's differing attitude to each of them. The first mention of the mother appears on page seven, and features a variety of colors: blue eyes, chestnut hair, gold-framed pince-nez glasses, kidney-colored marks, golden or copper-colored silk stockings, red-fox fur coat, dark circles under her eyes. She appears to be the focus of the family gaze in numerous photos taken of her skiing, fencing, doing gymnastics, swimming, and other activities. The photos are also duplicated in different tints: blue, green, pink, brown, and black. The narrator's extravagant attention to the image of the mother at the beginning of the story signals his childish obsession with her. In contrast, the image of the father remains solidly within the spectrum of neutral colors: steel, gray, silver, brown, and mostly black (Tarnawsky 9). He is described from the standpoint of respect and distance.

The young narrator also extracts from his memory several family photos that are black and white. He hints at some signs of adultery, possibly an illicit relationship between the father and his coworker, Miss

Adela, a member of the count's family, although this is never confirmed in the text. As the narrative moves forward, the image of the father, who first joins the German army and later the Ukrainian Insurgent Army, remains within the black-and-white spectrum, while the dying and decaying body of the mother takes on yellow, white, red, and black hues. In a final moment of absolute loneliness, the boy distances himself from both of his parents: "There was no one to watch over me because my mother had died and my father went away to fight the Russians" (228). Thus, his personal, independent identity must step forward now.

The family is described as a group with its own values, and the narrator cherishes the moments of its unity and well-being. He describes the traditions they practice, such as attending Mass on Sundays, followed by Sunday dinner, poring over family recipes, the father and mother dancing, visiting the grandmother in the mountains, family swimming and picnicking excursions, mushroom and berry picking, yearly vacations at the seashore, reading books with the parents, and many other activities.

This idyllic family atmosphere is marred by a peasant uprising. The protagonist is excited, knowing that he is well protected by his family collective. His father readies his pistol, and the protagonist takes his toy sword out to fight the rebels. The family stays inside the manor house, encircled by walls and locked gates that may be interpreted as border structures which regulate border crossings. At this first but far from final perilous moment, these well-fortified borders provide peace to the family, and the rebels march off at dawn. Unfortunately, when the borders of the entire country are violated, smaller communities cannot withstand the threat on their own. The historic turmoil becomes a turning-point, when the idea of the protagonist's wider—collective—identity, national identity, begins to germinate.

The final chapter of "Warm" shows the advance of the German troops, who may be seen as associated border agents, toward Poland. At this point, the walls and gates of the manor lose their power. They can no longer protect the family, so everyone runs outside to see the Germans. A closer look at the location of the characters offers us deeper insights into the conflict unfolding in the narrative: "There was father, and mother, and Nora, and me, and the hrabia,[38] and his sisters, and Adek and Bodek, and everyone else living at the manor, gathered at one corner of the intersection, and a much bigger crowd of people from the village in front of the schoolhouse at the other" (78).

The list of words connected with the repeated use of the same conjunction "and," polysyndeton, deepens the tension and separates the smaller group of main characters from the rest of the citizens of this borderland village. They are standing at a crossroads, a powerful image in its own right, but on different sides of it, awaiting the Germans. This configuration of actors and state powers contributes to the further development of the main character as a border crosser. It also anticipates more conflicts that are played out in the personal and collective layers of his identity and the question of belonging to different, competing and co-existent nations.

When the Borders Are Challenged

The second part of *Warm Arctic Nights*, entitled "Arctic," immediately presents deeper insights into relations among the Russians, Nazis, Poles, Jews, and Ukrainians at the outbreak of World War II through the image of a family home that was newly constructed but never seen by the protagonist from the inside. The new house was seized by the Russians when they occupied the country and later by the Germans, who "moved in and out of the house like some superior supernatural beings permitted to live in a magical space we craved but were not allowed to enter" (83). One possible interpretation of this passage is that the house serves as a symbol of Ukraine, a sacred space that has never been truly free, always caught between different superpowers. This corroborates the notion that a border is not just a dividing line but a

[38] Polish for "Count"

space through which a border crosser may pass in many different ways. Predictably, the boy makes his first efforts to identify his collective identity in this specific time-space juncture.

Collective identity, like personal identity, cannot be defined in terms of a single, consistent essence. It is always a negotiation and carving of We-ness out of They-ness by finding a link to some larger group; appreciation of its specific cultural, religious, geographical, political, linguistic, and historical singularity; and perception of Other-ness in both directions: toward Them as Others, and toward Us as Others for Them. All of these stages are clearly articulated by the narrators in the novel. For example, the boy describes a local girl whose hair is "in neat braids," her regional costume, and typical jewelry, sending the reader a signal that she belongs to the Ukrainian culture, but is a traitor betraying her collective. The language used to describe her and her deeds signifies the inclusion of the boy into the we-collective identity: "She had abandoned us and was on the side of the Germans. Like everyone else, I would stare at her with disdain and not speak to her if I were to meet her in the street" (84). The opposition between the Ukrainians, among whom the narrator includes himself, and the traitor sends a strong signal about his understanding of duty to the native collective identity.

While the first part of the novel includes numerous descriptions of traditional family meals and gatherings, the second part is replete with accounts of religious national holidays and traditions, such as St. Nicholas Day, Christmas Eve, caroling, May services, Easter, "Wet Monday" (Easter Monday in Poland), Pentecost, and others. The writer thus delineates the religious foundation of his collective identity. He also tries to do that by establishing strict linguistic borders. When the young narrator's sister, Nora, starts speaking Polish during their journey westward, the boy is "stunned," "burst[ing] out in anger, turning red in the face," "shocked to the limit, unable to find words," because they had never spoken to each other in Polish when they were alone (207). This passage implies that the siblings, members of a minority suppressed by a politically dominant group, speak Polish only in public.

While speaking Ukrainian within the family is a matter of consciously choosing Ukrainian national identity, the crossing of linguistic borders depends on specific spatial and political factors. When the sister crosses the linguistic and, simultaneously, highly symbolic border, she is called a "traitor" by her brother. Once again, the novel interacts with Tarnawsky's reality of always "living in the linguistic battleground":

> Virtually all my life I have been multilingual, using two or more languages in my daily life. The first five years of my life I spent in Poland. There I spoke Ukrainian at home, and Polish outside. From the age of five till ten I lived in Ukraine and used Ukrainian only, except we studied German in school and I got to know it fairly well. Then, from the age of ten until eighteen, I lived in Germany, in a displaced persons camp. There we spoke Ukrainian, but German on the outside. In addition, part of the time, I attended German Grammar School, then High School. So German became an important language in my life. In the US, it was Ukrainian and English, and when I worked on the Machine Translation project, I got to know Russian quite well. The years 1964-65 I spent in Spain, and I used English, Ukrainian, and Spanish. I became quite fluent in Spanish and actually wrote some poetry in it. At this time, I continue using these three languages much of the time. Recently, I occasionally also use Polish and German. ("An Interview with Yuriy Tarnawsky," *BIG OTHER*, Part 2, n.p.)

The novel spans the first ten years of the writer's life, so we may suppose that during this period he inhabited three competing linguistic spaces: Ukrainian, Polish, and German. Tarnawsky offers the reader many clues about his cultural affiliation: for example, when he mentions his reading interests that include books about the Zaporozhian Cossacks who fought against the Poles and Tatars. This reference adds a historic perspective to the Ukrainians' perpetual struggle for their language, culture, freedom, and independence.

Another important image of the Other in the novel is the image of Jews. They are first mentioned at the family's Christmas Eve celebration, which is interrupted by a German patrol that is searching for Jews. The narrator recounts his grandmother's reaction, who says that "if there were Jews among us [...] they should be left alone. They were human, like Christians, and would have to celebrate a Christian holiday together with us" (86). The following chapters feature a series of detailed descriptions of two separate executions witnessed by the boy: one of Jews and the other, of Ukrainians. In both cases he is shocked and suffers from dreadful nightmares. He is on the verge of becoming ill, and has feelings of enormous guilt after witnessing these atrocities.

Eventually, the number of collective and personal traumas becomes overwhelming. The narrator describes Russian prisons where people are tortured, murdered, and fed food prepared with the flesh of murdered people; he recalls that his uncle was subjected to similar tortures in a Polish prison. The boy secretly goes to the morgue to view the corpses of two men who were killed by a Kalmyk soldier recruited by the Germans. In spite of the representation of Germans as Others and enemies, at some point the young narrator confesses his admiration for them. They are "blond and young-looking, like evil young angels, in their black uniforms with the silver markings" (152), this memory betokening the fact that "a biographical me is a selective construction from past situational me's" (MacKinnon and Heise 104) and that "not all cultural identities that compose an identity set are adopted in a life story" (MacKinnon and Heise 105).

In chapter after chapter, the atmosphere in the novel turns increasingly darker, and reaches its culmination in the Germans' retreat and the approaching Soviet armies. This is the precise moment when the tragedy of the Ukrainian nation, divided, raped, and torn asunder, is symbolically connected with the image of a dying mother. The narrator is forced to cross both temporal and geographical borders, for "in biographical terms, important divisions between life stages, or between life and non-life (at the borders constituted by birth and death) are often marked by topographical border crossings" (Schimanski 47).

Narrative Border Structures

In the meantime, the young storyteller shares two remarkable stories about the rivers in the village. As mentioned earlier, rivers are border structures that, in the first part of the book, help the narrator to send presents to his imaginary brother. In the context of peace and prosperity, a river is a natural vehicle that crosses borders and unites people. But in the second part of the book, the rivers in the village are re-interpreted as dividing lines. Crossing them can lead to death, the fate that befalls a boy who dives into the Natalka River to catch a fish but drowns in front of a group of village boys.

The presence of the Vechir River leads the narrator himself into violating the limits between life and death. One day, he volunteers to drown the neighbor's kittens. This task and its actualization raise powerful, conflicting emotions in the boy, such as hatred, disgust, and deep shame. Both stories resurface in the dramatic finale of the book. When the boy finds himself stranded in a foreign country, he remembers the kittens that he drowned, and perceives his present situation as punishment for that cruelty. He also recalls how he once caught a fish underwater by hurling himself on top of it, then throwing it onto the pebbled riverbank, where the fish lay gasping for water. He concludes that "I've been a monster then and no wonder I was finding myself in this situation. I was being punished for having been one" (227). There is a clear parallel between the images of the helpless kittens cast into the river and the fish thrown onto the shore and the uprooted boy, who has been catapulted into the unpredictability of a new environment as a refugee.

Trains are another type of border structure that accrues importance over the course of the novel. In the first part, trains are used by the family to travel to the grandmother's house in the mountains and the seaside. In both cases, the young boy is excited and cannot "resist the temptation of leaning out the

window time and time again, especially on the curves" (38). Interestingly, the narrator imbues these trains with the characteristics of his home: "[T]he seats in the train we took to grandmother's had wooden benches built similarly to the one in front of our house except of varnished yellow wood and walls of the same material" (49). Trains are portrayed differently in the second part of the novel, where they are used by the Germans to retreat. In an act of daring, the boy boards a hospital train carrying wounded German soldiers back to Germany. He is mesmerized by its stark white interior spattered with occasional red blood stains, the smell of medicine mixed with something sickening, and the silence that "rang in my ears like a soft endless whining sound made by someone in great pain" (154). The boy is spellbound until the train starts to move, and he barely manages to jump off. The image of a train now acquires evil features—equally attractive and sinister—which are intensified in the third part of the novel, entitled "Nights."

Border Crossing

The final part of *Warm Arctic Nights*, which is entirely devoted to the main character's journey to the West, opens with the mother's death and her funeral, the father's return home and his departure. The narrator's allusion to the story of Agamemnon and his daughter, Iphigenia, underlines a leader's duty toward his people, a weighty responsibility that outweighs family considerations. Thus, he justifies his father's choice to give priority to national interests over those of his family and to fight for the Ukrainian people. The boy is left on his own, and he suffers from nightmares in which tactile images of warmth and cold are intermingled. Concurrently, the notion of a stable, demarcated border was challenged by the Russians' advance and the German army's retreat. The border is becoming porous—a dangerous, liminal space that sparks fear and leads to death. The protagonist needs someone's assistance in crossing it. Such a person is a new character, Stefa, a distant cousin of his mother's. Before fleeing, the narrator refers once more to the symbol of the deserted family home, which has been abandoned by the Germans but remains uninhabited. Ironically, there is no family to settle there down anymore.

On the night that he flees, the boy skids on a spot where a bucketful of wild strawberries had spilled earlier, and stains his shorts. This red, blood-like mark is interpreted by his companions as an omen. Nevertheless, the young narrator is fascinated during the first part of his journey, imagining that he is traveling by boat to a strange country. This image hearkens back to the first part of the novel in which rivers and train travel are connected with happy childhood memories. Gradually, the allure of travel begins to pall. When the refugees arrive at a huge train depot in a Hungarian town, the young narrator feels that he is becoming the Other in this new unfamiliar and hostile world.

His apprehension grows after encountering Atrament, a photographer, whom he used to know well. Atrament gives him the manuscript of his book entitled *Theory of Man* to take with him and have it published in the West. When the boy starts reading it, he realizes that the book is an interpretation of the Bible seeking to prove that all people are created equal, so they should love and worship each other. Based on his experience of life thus far, he cannot accept this bizarre idea and tears the book apart, as though tearing off the petals from a daisy, all the while saying, "God loves me, God loves me not." The boy disposes of the book when the train is crossing over a river (a natural dividing line loaded with symbolic meanings of passage and initiation), along a bridge (a structure that facilitates border crossing, another of the protagonist's helpers), and pronounces the words, "God loves me not!" This remarkable scene is a metaphor that generates multiple parallels and which ranges not just throughout the novel but in many other texts that Tarnawsky created earlier. It also dovetails with his philosophical quests, profound fascination with questions of death and faith, and his life-long interest in existentialism.

Another notable theme of the novel is crime and punishment. In addition to the story about the drowning of the kittens, there are two more examples of similar motifs in the third part of Tarnawsky's novel. The first is connected with the boy's quarrels with his Uncle Genko, his wish for the man to die; his

uncle ends up dying, killed by a speeding train. The narrator feels morally responsible for his death, but also a vague satisfaction that it was a kind of revenge for the uncle's menace toward him. The absence of punishment leads to thoughts of murdering Stefa's son, which are triggered by his fear that Stefa will abandon him.

The final pages of the novel offer a kind of answer to the boy's dilemmas. The train leaves without the boy, who is now desperate and alone, in the middle of nowhere. The border crosser is torn between seeing his displacement as a providential punishment or an objective outcome of the war. The narrator-interviewer asks, "Like dying?" and the other voice answers, "It is said that when you die, the whole life flashes in an instant before your eyes. There are other times like that too—it took no more than a few seconds for me to think all I've enumerated above" (229). Displacement is thus represented as a form of dying. It is the moment when the border is crossed between the past and the future, childhood and adult life, dreams and reality, belonging and uprooting. At the same time, the border itself becomes fractured: "The border is split when crossed. Its status as a barrier is compromised; it reveals itself as a passage. The border is both affirmed and denied" (Schimanski 45).

Conclusions

To summarize, the novel *Warm Arctic Nights*, featuring Yuriy Tarnawsky's "biographical me," is constructed "as a narrative integration of memorable elements in the individual's identity set," and as MacKinnon and Heise further state, that "while this kind of identity work is individual, it is not entirely private. […] Often, the identity work involved in the construction of a biographical me is a manifestly collaborative enterprise as well. In this case, the individual engages in a discourse with an audience, and the audience participates in the construction of a biographical me, influencing the story" (103-104).

This is an apt explanation of the polyphony of the narrative voices in the novel; the author's dialogue with his readers and his discourse with previous historical narratives on displacement and war; the desire to validate his personal, collective, and national identities from among the multiple identity sets that he could have chosen; his desire to tell a story composed of his memories and grounded in his imagination to account for the changes, and to make sense of his belonging in a wider perspective of specificity of the Ukrainian émigré experience and its universality.

The analysis has also demonstrated that Tarnawsky's novel *Warm Arctic Nights* is an example of a border-crossing narrative that shifts from the closeness and comfort provided by stable, protected personal, geographical, and state borders toward the constant intrusion of border agents as well as the porousness and violation of borders. Ultimately, the narrator is forced to flee Ukraine and cross borders, not only to save his life but to die in a metaphorical sense after having lost his home, his family, and his country. This tale of a lost childhood is emblematic of the experience of present-day refugees, and reveals both culture-specific and universal aspects of the experience of wartime trauma.

Ukrainians are certainly not the only people currently fleeing from a war waged by an authoritarian state. Thus, Tarnawsky's narrative gives voice to the universal experience of displacement, which has remained topical over the centuries for millions of émigrés throughout the world.

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Author:

Tetiana OSTAPCHUK is a visiting researcher at University College London (2022 – 2023), currently working on the project "Ukrainian Borders in Times of Crisis: Comparative Cultural Perspective." Her research interests are in the spheres of Comparative Cultural Studies, Cultural Border Studies, Memory and Trauma Studies, and Diaspora Studies.

Recent publications are: *Crossing Borders: Representations of Ukrainian Diasporas* (Editor, EUXEINOS—Culture and Governance in the Black Sea Region—Nr. 30—12/2020); "Encoding and Decoding 'Imagined Ukraines' in American Movies**.**" ((*Pop*)*Cultures on the Move: Transnational Identifications and Cultural Exchange Between East and West*, edited by Astrid M. Fellner, Tetiana Ostapchuk, Bärbel Schlimbach, SARAVI PONTES—Universaar, 2018, pp. 51-66)); "Images of Chernobyl Explosion Liquidators in Audio Visual Art." ((*Audio-*)*Visual Arts and Trauma: From the East to the West*, edited by Janett Reinstadler and Oleksandr Pronkevich, SARAVI PONTES—Universaar, 2018, pp. 69-93)); "A Reading of Alexander Motyl's *Fall River* Through the Lenses of Bordermemories." (*Kyiv-Mohyla Humanities Journal*, [S.l.], No. 5, December 2028, pp 83-95, ISSN 2313-4895)

Contact: t.ostapchuk@ucl.ac.uk

Syeda Memoona Ali
Independent Scholar, Lahore, Pakistan

Cartography of a Refugee Camp in Mohammed Hanif's *Red Birds*: Transformation from a Place of Subjugation into a Space of Agency

Abstract: The presence of war refugee camps around the world and their development into places of political resistance for identity formation, alternate governance systems and lives has been part of academic studies for quite some time now. Less attention has been paid to frame refugee camp spaces for studying the complexity of the concepts of resistance and indifference for reclamation of human identity. Despite attention to the mass movement of refugees-asylum seekers, there is a huge gap in scholarship to understand the center-controlled and marginalized refugee existence in camps because refugees are often silenced, insignificant obscure figures in the grand war discourse of reports and case studies—lives not worth saving. Furthermore, refugees' resistance against the center's anti-humanity beliefs, ideologies and practices calls for a reengagement with the camp space because it has become a source of material and knowledge production for the center to profile and subject all types of refugees to any physical, mental and psychological testing-experimentation whenever it develops a new weapon, therapy, theory or technology. This paper intends to cover these gaps and build its analysis of a refugee camp, through the text *Red Birds* (2018).

Keywords: refugee camp, liminality, resistance, center, indigenous knowledge and traditions, spiritual.

Introduction

Refugee camps have been either studied, in Agamben's terms, as a "space of exception" which allows refugees a "bare life" (133) or to quote from Adam Ramadan's work, "a distinctive political space" (65) that reflects "complex sovereignties" that "operate in camps and offer the possibilities of agency" (68). Olivius on the other hand sums up the plight of camps either as places to be saved or as threats to normality that need to be destroyed ("Sites of Repression"). The camp studies, due to their dependence upon primary studies conducted in real refugee camps that could not investigate them beyond refugees' physical lives with either positive or negative stories of camps, do not provide a reflection upon human rights other than the basic rights. The impact of war and prolonged refugee existence on human lives and values often seems missing. Hanif's refugee camp, on the other hand, a literary piece, offers a broader scope of investigation in terms of refugee existence and resistance for the physical and symbolic refugee camps due to its fluidity between the real and imagined beyond the scales of human primacy and allows for a perception of camp space emotionally, affectively, collectively, in ways that are missing in physical reports and case studies.

This study investigates the spatio-temporal significance of the "USAID 'Fugee Camp" (92), as a space of liminality that changes from a place of passivity to a place of resistance and focuses on the transformed power relations between the center and refugees represented by "The Hangar" and "Camp." The paper highlights the unique quality of one refugee family's resistance and refusal to deal with their missing son's trauma. Mother Dear is an ordinary, presumably, uneducated desert woman. Bro Ali is her seventeen-year-old son who is missing for the last seven months. Momo is the younger son, a fifteen-year-old school dropout teenager but smart enough to self-educate himself about the world outside the Camp.

Furthermore, the paper investigates the refugee camp as a space that allows for an exploration of Jasper's concept of personal human guilt at multiple levels for its permanent and temporary inhabitants (*German Guilt*). This study scrutinizes the ways this concept allows their family to deal with it at a spiritual level beyond the worldly (mostly physical and psychological) confinements. The paper, thus, studies the very concept of power in the camp that undergoes a shift from the physical to metaphysical.

This study is significant because it allows for an understanding of the physical and symbolic entrapment of human beings both from the margin (Camp) and center (The Hangar) into visible and invisible camps due to their experience of modern wars fought throughout the world that have failed to contribute towards building a better and peaceful world. The study, further, provides a space of intellectual dialogue between the victims and perpetrators through an investigation of the concept of "closure" to the trauma of war with acceptance of responsibility and seeking forgiveness from those one has wronged as the only condition to negotiate lasting peace. The study contributes towards challenging the notion of a camp in the context of the entire world reduced to a refugee camp dependent upon a Hangar for its security to understand the imbalanced scales.

Red Birds (2018) tells the Camp's story in sixty chapters, in three distinct sections—"In the Desert," "In the Camp" and "To the Hangar,"—with three dominant voices Ellie, Momo and Mutt. Mother Dear, Lady Flowerbody and Cath are three feminine narrative voices that are comparatively smaller (appearance in third section) but clear and distinct. The text has one non-human narrator, Mutt, the stray or philosopher dog, adopted by Ali and Momo as children. Mutt narrates most of the story, seventeen chapters to be precise, to add coherence to the story, to reflect upon human condition and provide a non-human perspective on war and its aftermath. The refugee family comprises Mother Dear, Bro Ali, Momo, Mutt and Father Dear who have lived in the USAID refugee camp since the war began. As the story goes, the center erected a Hangar as well for its own military use. Father Dear found a job with the Americans and helped them carry out their logistics. Later, Bro Ali joined the Hangar. Seven months ago, the Americans bombed the refugee family's home, a surprise that made Ali go to the Hangar, where he was lost. The bombing stopped and American planes started crashing, resulting in The Hangar being closed. Major Ellie had been sent to bomb the Camp, in an attempt to complete his boss's (Col. Slater) mission of eliminating it, the Camp being seen as a threat. However, his plane had crashed and he had been saved by Momo. Mother Dear and Momo are now actively waiting for Ali's return, whereas Father Dear is waiting for the Hangar to reopen. The family's search for their missing son, Ali, ends in the Hangar where Momo finds his brother's lifeless body, hanging from the ceiling.

Camp as a Place of Liminality

In order to study the camp's initial status as a place of passivity and liminality, Olivius' concept of "refugees as individuals who need to be developed, modernized, and improved" (292) and Foucault's concept of "an abnormal individual" (*History of Sexuality*, Vol 1, p. 95) will be applied. The center's application of these two concepts on the camp makes them the center's technology to exclude people and place them in a physical enclosure that excludes refugees from their traditional way of life, taking away their freedom to choose and decide for themselves and making them believe in the center's absolute power. Therefore, a refugee camp set up for war victims where refugees take refuge believing to save their lives until the war ends and their life goes back to normal seems naïve. The center has brought war in the region and created the camp under certain ideologies of control. Hence, the very creation of the camp becomes an announcement of refugees' need for development, modernity and enlightenment that the center proclaims to achieve through their introduction to modern weapons. The center assumes, in the modern world "[T]hings must quicken, interventions must take place," as Colonel Slatter, Ellie's superior, proclaims:

> You [the center] can't give them drip irrigation and tent schools and hope for them to become civilized and accomplish the next millennium goals. Where's the thrill in that? Give these men on camelbacks rocket launchers and see them arrive in the new millennium with a bang. They don't even need an ideology. Or any elaborate training. A rocket launcher doesn't require you to have the ability to aim. Get it on your shoulder and aim. (33)

Here, development becomes synonymous with control. Hence, the assumption of power to control refugees' lives through weapons is essentially without any cultural, social and environmental insight because this demands seriousness and responsibility. However, the center is looking for the "thrill" that the long-term millennium goals set for development definitely do not provide.

The center's efforts of developing the refugees, in fact, displace them from their homes and their relocation in the camps demands that they live on the bare minimum in terms of the subsistence that the center provides them. The center, to quote Weighill, provides refugees "assistance… as a substitute for their rights and in the process has been inextricably linked with their continual and progressive disempowerment" (294-5). Father Dear is happy with his state of "disempowerment" and does not rise to the challenge of resisting the center even after the disappearance of his own son, Bro Ali. He has maintained his faith in the center's ideologies and this faith is manifested through his wait for the reopening of the Hangar after a seven months closure during which the camp has received no aid. He has been physically and psychologically disempowered by this faith. All he achieves out of the job is disgust from his own family and mistrust from other refugees whose sons he has sent to the Hangar for menial jobs and they have never returned. The center has successfully developed, modernized or controlled him because his subjugation to the center is so comprehensive and absolute that he is unable to raise his voice against the American bombing of the Camp that has been killing the refugees for a long time. For Father Dear, in Sanbar's words, the refugee camp has proved to be "… a time-space of dislocation: a space of displacement and exile and a time of interruption, waiting and stasis" (11). He has not waited and reflected before forsaking his cultural ideology. For him, the Camp has never been an exile because he has adopted the center's ideologies in the hope of winning its allegiance. Thus, for him the Camp is a place of permanent dislocation, which began with his physical dislocation when he left his family and their way of life, and developed into psychological dislocation from his people and their way of life.

The center's control of the Camp has transformed refugees into subjects who could be tested physically, psychologically and emotionally by conducting different experiments upon them and by making sure they never recover from war. The Camp, like other refugee camps in war-created emergencies, is a manifestation of the myth of refugees' need for protection: first physical and then mental. As Olivius notes, "values of peace, tolerance, democracy, human rights and gender equality are assumed to be absent in societies affected by emergencies" (301). So, the center's war alienates the refugees from their values and dispossess them of their humanity because its cultural capital is informed through a long history of occupations—dispossessing and displacing people—and failed wars. Otherwise, before the arrival of the war they (refugees) were "[P]eople who had not left their hamlets for centuries, goatherds who believed in nothing but grassy fields and folk music" and their women "had never walked beyond the village well" (Hanif 32-33). The center has turned them into refugees so "…they could all go and live in UN tents, eat exotic food donated by USAID and burp after drinking fizzy drinks" (32-33). Meanwhile, the center has destroyed all the "grassy fields" and "folk music" so that people could never recover after suffering through the war. Nature and music are the "expressions of beauty, resilience and hope" (Davis, "What Does Not Burn" n.p.). It is only with the passage of time when the refugees' utility as victims and subjects in that war has ended, after the testing of different weapons and psychological theories, that the Camp has been "downgraded" (8). It is upon Colonel Slatter to decide its fate because he believes it has "shut" his "Hangar.

But the refugee camp… still exists" (Hanif 9). The camp becomes a vivid example of the center's desire to put a neat closure to one of its failed humanitarian projects, transformed into "...a real bad place full of bad people" that are so full of "evil" that if killed "nobody is going to miss this lot" (8). The center's exercise of power in branding simple "goat herds" first into "refugees" (32) and then into "bad people" (8) justifies its actions globally and at home when the nations join hands in wars and people pay taxes to support war expenditure without questioning innocent killings in far off lands.

Moreover, the center's blind arrogance of war and confidence in its "finest world explosives" or still "five hundred pounds bombs" (Hanif 249) besides other war machinery, has proven detrimental to the natural desert environment and its people. As the text relates, before the war refugees were desert people and played a significant role towards their environment and its resources, which provided them subsistence and helped in maintaining the healthy ecosystems in the region. With their dislocation into the Camp, these traditional goat herds or settlers have been dispossessed of their precious desert resources which they had been using and conserving for centuries through their nomadic way of living. Their resource management enabled the desert environment to recuperate itself regularly. However, the imposition of war and locals' reduction to refugees, and transference of land to the Hangar, has killed many of the desert species due to increased temperatures caused by the Hangar and its combat activities. Now, as Ellie observes after his fall, "there is not a single leaf of grass, not even dried up bush. Earth is a hotplate… even the scorpions have abandoned this godforsaken desolation" (5). The Americans' lack of knowledge, along with a complete disregard of the place and its environment, has transformed "the desert[s] into wasteland[s]" (226). The repeated bombing of the Camp and its surrounding areas as possible hideouts of the enemy, crashing of planes, movement of vehicles, fuel storage, have damaged the sensitive ecology of this place and put a strain on precious drinking water resources. The camp population has been forced to share it with the Hangar when their supply of bottled water ends. The soldiers' use of armored cars with guns pointed at refugees, to access the clean drinking water supply, which is a collection of rain water in a pond, is absurd and reflects upon the ambivalent relationship between the center's hegemony and vulnerability.

The psychological dislocation of refugees such as Father Dear helps the center in establishing its control over the Camp population. However, the center never lets this dependence upon local people and their resources become its weakness. Father Dear's cooperation does not change his refugee status and his Hangar issued "security badge" would not allow him to go beyond a certain level inside the Hangar. As the text mentions, when the camp was setup,

> Father Dear became Mr. Fix It for the people at the Hangar, their logistics man, their local guy. He procured goats for them, and when they asked for local help, he got them boy laborers, boys on daily wages who were sent off to do small jobs, fixing broken barbed wires and filling sandbags to make more bunkers. Sometimes the boys didn't come back but those were busy times and nobody took much notice. (28)

Moreover, this psychological dislocation transforms into moral degradation when Father Dear includes his elder son, Bro Ali, in the war job market and he does "a bit of target spotting for those people in the Hangar" (Hanif 27). It is definitely well paid because when other men in the camp have become mostly "drunks" and for a living "pimping their wives," this refugee family is the "only tightly-knit, upright family…" (27). The nature of Ali's employment remains a "top secret" and outwardly everybody has been told that it is mainly "…fixing radars on the planes" (188). The other refugees, however, consider Father Dear's act as "selling" (29) him and Mutt, the only sane creature in the Camp believes, "You don't sell your sons even if you are paid in dollars" (29). The cooperation with the Hangar comes at a dehumanizing price. Father Dear's logic of absolute trust in the center and a desire for certainty through material security, by completely forgoing his tribal desert traditions, blurs his previous boundaries between right and wrong.

Mother Dear calls it "licking boots of every white man" (229). His faith in the center's war aggrandizement and lust for dollars confirms the moral transmogrification of all those people who forgo their responsibility as human beings towards other human beings.

This alliance between the Hangar and Father Dear is questioned by his family only when their own house is bombed. Ali, then, decides to go for a full-time job inside the Hangar. He never returns but "[E]verybody in the Camp thinks he has gone with the Americans and sends" his family "money" (Hanif 187). Mother Dear's character development is marked through her tears for her missing son. Thus, for this family the Camp is, initially, a place of cooperation to participate in the war and to earn its meagre share from the war economy as the best available job market. As Mutt relates, "…you don't get to own a big jeep by being pacifists" (27). All that they, Father and son, did was to develop the set of skills required by the war economy. Bro Ali realizes his mistake and pays by going into the Hangar which ends the bombing of the Camp. However, this comes with a price because the center not only closes the Hangar but also stops the aid it was giving for running the Camp. The center perceives Ali's desire to save his home as a transgression and punishes it. When Momo finds Ali's body, in the Hangar, a brief dialogue between the brothers—one alive and the other dead—takes place, where Ali relates the cause of his disappearance. He says, "They think I brought down their planes. They think they had to shut down the Hangar. They think I am a traitor" (277).

The devastating transformation of Father Dear into a spineless character can be attributed to the American war that has drastically changed the socio-economic character of the entire desert region. It has set up the USAID refugee Camp there as once "…there were houses instead of this Camp, when there was no war" (Hanif 27). The war and aid have forced local people to take up the occupations and learn the skills that do not define them. For instance, the Doctor was "only a farmer with an interest in herbs" (226). The war has made him a doctor not by study and training but through "trial and error" (15) and because of his ability to drive an ambulance. Father Dear, on the other hand, has chosen this type of life. He had belonged to the tribe of hunters and had been "son of the Chief" (234). He then left his tribal family because he did not want to hunt, considering it too primitive and inhuman. He has decided to live in the desert in "freedom from his traditions" (235). His thwarted hopes have made him a "devious man" who once was "not so slippery" (234). However, instead of showing remorse for his missing son, "he took pride in his idiocy, his passive stubbornness" (235). He has been called a "child trader" and the one "who sold his own son in the hope of job security" to the Americans whereas he "…could have been a small-time prince" but the arrival of the center has "made him a petty bureaucrat" (248).

Hanif's portrayal of the Camp, simultaneously, allows for a study of the center's failure to recognize its own degradation that questions its claims of upholding democratic values and human rights protection. This can be understood in terms of what Foucault calls "systems of exclusion" (*Foucault Live* 65) and Hanif uses Major Ellie's character to narrate most of the story of the Camp for the "criticism to come from within" (*Foucault Live* 65) the center. Ellie notices the center's hypocrisy from the very geography of the camp with just a gate and no boundary walls in comparison to the Hangar that has a proper gate, barbed-wired-walls, tanks, guns and planes for protection. There is a huge disparity in the provision of basic human needs such as drinking water, and conflict in the rights between the Hangar and the Camp. Lady Flowerbody working for the center has access to clean drinking water as opposed to the refugees. Momo's comparison of the bottled water and the French sparkling water "Perrier," which is collected at the source, so that its health benefits are not lost—that the American government officials and generals drink in their meetings before attacking a nation or a country—to the drinking water in the Camp, is significant. Momo, a teenager, is smart enough to notice this expenditure difference but the people in the center cannot. The water in the camp tastes of metal and it is considered fit for the refugees' drinking because their right to roam in the desert across countries and regions for better resources has been "rejected" (*Foucault Live* 65) after the

psychological dislocation of their fathers—the decision makers for women, children, environment, flora and fauna. The center's wars have killed all life forms which were intricately interdependent and have transformed responsible people into refugees, with a loss of their precious indigenous knowledge. The refugee children are born in the Camp and know nothing about the natural desert habitat and fresh water resources. They believe their region is without history, values and traditions of its own and there is nothing left of that life. The center and fathers have dispossessed them of their land's knowledge.

To understand the center's mental deterioration, we have to place it in the perspective of war economy. Only then it becomes clear that for the center, waging wars on defenseless people is a matter of business routine and wars offer war managers myriad opportunities to "restructuring" (Hanif 8) their businesses. Otherwise, wars are no longer fought to achieve peace and they do not end but change form and restart under a new ideology. A glance around the globe at the ongoing conflicts confirms it. Major Ellie ponders over modern warfare and comments: "[N]ow we have war for the sake of war. No lands are captured, no slaves taken, no mass rapes, fuck their oil wells, ignore their mine deposits… War has been condensed to carpet-bombing followed by dry rations and craft classes for the refugees" (32).

The conflicts keep the war economy alive and offer, as Olivius suggests, a "cordoning off of refugees" and soldiers that "enables a spatial" and mental "control" (290). This cordoning off cages the refugees in camps and allows the American soldiers to apparently play the part of the saviors and basically to benefit from material security that comes from working in the army. Ellie's has been the reassignment of the mission that Col. Slatter had failed: bombing the Camp. But to him the site of the Camp from air does not make it look like a terrorists hide out and he hesitates despite the fact that he controls the "tool of violence" (Tal 10), his plane. He calls his plane, Strike Eagle. It is "a 65-million-dollar machine… with the smartest bomb that some beam rider in Salt Lake City took years to design" in which he "burn[t] fuel at the rate of fifteen gallons per second" (Hanif 3). For him, flying "half way around the world to bomb a place that is already a ruin because of previous bombings" (159) reflects upon the mental deterioration of the center. His inability questions the spending of all the precious US dollars on developing the most expensive and advanced weapons when this money could have been spent, to quote Nye, on buying "eggs… ribbons… really soft pillows" (n.p.). These are the things which are really needed by people instead of all the violence and misery caused by these destructive weapons.

The actual viewing of the refugee camp shifts Ellie's perspective. He can no longer believe and act within the ideologies he has been taught by the center during his cordoning off as a soldier. He is a witness of the center's atrocities on the camp. He has been made to not only realize his own role in causing that destruction but also to ask questions about his responsibility at a human level. Tadjo says, "… the act of bearing witness is what remains for us in our attempt to combat the past and register our humanity" (85). Breaking free of his mental cordoning off, he questions "Martin Baker zero ejection seats" (249) or even "flying jacket[s]" (12) that are sold to the army with the assurance that they are above "human error" (Hanif 278) and safe for the pilots. The center believes that the soldiers must feel proud of themselves while using them. Ellie questions this folly and mocks that false sense of pride the center tries to inculcate in its soldiers. He warns that, "Do you love your machine that you'll sacrifice your life for it? There wouldn't be any point in that. They wouldn't even be able to show your proud patriotic face to your beloved family because they know your family wouldn't want to see your face with your eyes melted out of their sockets" (249).

Ellie's own experience of surviving the crash makes him reflect upon the center's claims of patriotism that it sells to its own people at home. He highlights that the training instructors at the Central Command "… don't tell you that it [flying jacket] can't protect your eyes from melting in their sockets" (Hanif 12) or the "…five hundred-pound bombs… cause a little inferno… and the twenty-thousand-dollar helmet won't stop you from turning into a lump of twisted coal" (249-250). The text refers to this expenditure as an

absurdity which is done to destroy a presumed enemy who has already been dispossessed of their home, life, culture, values, land and resources. This raises serious questions about the center's and its people's sanity.

Red Birds reminds us again and again that the center is waging war against an enemy who lives in perpetual misery because their survival has been reduced to selling their sons. The center continues to terrorize the refugees with the Hangar. Refugees know that it has "gunship helicopters that can see in the dark" along with ruthless "big scary dogs" (Hanif 227). The center's resourcefulness perpetuates a sense of fear in refugees and prevents them from protesting against the bombing of their homes and their disappeared sons. On top of that the center has well trained soldiers who control all the weapons and can kill them on whim or if they perceive them as a threat. For instance, the boy who asks about his missing brother and stands in front of the armored car that is going to collect water from the Camp pond is killed by the soldier with his gun because his training asks him to eliminate everything that he perceives as threat.

For soldiers, it is their job and work they are paid to do with benefits. In addition to that, the ritual of celebrating every bombing, as Ellie recalls, "it gives meaning to" one's "work, even if" one's "work involves two thousand miles up and down very low over enemy territory just to draw fire, so that your buddies can pinpoint hostile pockets" (Hanif 159). However, it is the kind of work that one cannot explain to one's "loved ones without freaking them out" (160). Ellie's comments highlight the sickened psychological dislocation of the center that results in Post Traumatic Disorder Syndrome for its soldiers and pilots ruining their lives forever, transforming their humanity and letting them rot in eternal conflicts of soul for which the center has no cure.

The Camp in *Red Birds* continues the exploration of the center's sickening state of humanity with its refusal to be eliminated despite continuous bombing. Hanif's "USAID FUGEE CAMP" where the "RE seems to have dislodged itself out of embarrassment" (92), fits in both Agamben's (*Homo Sacer*) and Agier et al.'s ("Between War and City") definition of "camp as a space of exception set outside of the places and outside of the time of a common, ordinary, predictable world" (Agier 323) but different in character. It protests and calls for its recognition as a permanent marker on Central Command's conscience. It has refused to be eliminated despite being, "everything that's wrong with the Camp, with its dependent refugee status, its eternal wait for some plane to appear in the sky and relieve every one of their misery" (Hanif 182). It has stayed so that the center should confront the truth about its barbarity and cruelty. Upon finding Ali's body in the Hangar, Momo notes, "Bro Ali is hanging from the ceiling like a human chandelier… They have got him tied up from three sides. His arms spread out, they have got him strung up in mid-air through a system of chains and pulleys" (275).

The Americans have killed him and then have hanged him to justify their own failure. The Camp points out the limitations of the world's most expensive and sophisticated weapons because they, like other machines, are liable to "human error" (Hanif 278). However, the Americans put the blame on a teenager, kill and hang him in an attempt to atone themselves. Ali has "… only fiddled with some frequencies. And they [American planes] came tumbling down" (278).

Moreover, the truth about the center's "humanitarian apparatus," according to Verdirame et al.'s study is that it "has been transformed into a custodial regime for innocent people" (publisher's site)[39] that never intends to engage with refugees at a human level: first they were victims, now they are terrorists. The humanitarian apparatus has to function within these boundaries: they have to keep alive the refugees

[39] See https://www.rsc.ox.ac.uk/publications/rights-in-exile-janus-faced-humanitarianism#:~:text=Based%20on%20rich%20ethnographic%20data,rights%20and%20international%20law%20scholars.

so that they could be eliminated, in the next round of war, as terrorists. The Camp demonstrates it through its clothing, as Ellie notes, "Half the refugee kids wear discarded uniforms from European police forces and paramilitaries. Anyone venturing here for the first time could easily mistake it for a grand reunion of forgotten armies" (Hanif 200). The people in the Camp have survived even after seven months of no food supply from the USAID because they "still" had "some goats and camels" (Hanif 110) and when they have not died due to starvation, the Central Command has decided to wipe them out by bombing it once, for all to believe it to be some "…extraterritorial enclavic" place "where the juridical order is suspended" and any "… arbitrary power" can be "exercised…" (Minca 6580). However, the camp's refusal to be annihilated without a just closure marks its development from a space of the center's control and leads to its scrutiny as a space of resistance.

Camp as a Space of Resistance

In order to study the camp as a space of resistance, this section focuses on the concepts of trauma, guilt and indifference. The section takes an issue with the center's popular Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder Theories and the role of researchers. Hanif's Camp offers physical, emotional and psychological dimensions of resistance, refusing the center a neat closure to its own trauma that it attempts to achieve through eliminating the camp without dealing with its guilt. The Camp has to prove the center's hypothesis that "our collective memories are our cultural capital" (Hanif 44) wrong and to resist the appropriation of refugees' loss under such broad generalizations in the center funded reports and books.

The Camp has to remain the center's technology of control during and after the war. It is the testing ground for new weapons to study their impact upon human beings and this technology of control transforms when the "surveyors" (Hanif 43) from all over the world come to study the victims of war and try to gauge the drastic psychological impact of living in a refugee camp with loss. They come to the camp equipped with their preconceived notions about refugees and imported trauma theories. Bracken denounces the practice and feels that it has been done "without any great thought of the great cultural, social and other difficulties" (7) of the refugees. The camp becomes a space of protest and critique upon the center for this senseless act which is similar to the act of bringing war to lands, cultures and ecosystems. This critique is achieved through the reflection of refugee-response-discourse with the researcher, Lady Flowerbody, which in turn confirms Bracken's statement. It further highlights the nuance in dealing with trauma at a personal level and reinstates the human stature of the refugees. In the center's discourse they are a mere "stack of papers" (Hanif 43) who might never be considered as independent individuals capable of managing their emotions and sense of loss. They have been reduced to a collective hoard of victims whom Lady Flowerbody, a "USAID consultant" can study as "families affected by raids" living in "post-conflict" (43), as a set of data neatly arranged in the controlled environment of a refugee camp. Even the research that she is conducting as part of her "PhD Thesis on Muslim Minds," that "might become a book, *The Children of the Desert*" (44), is without any intent to understand refugees. She says, "I intend to use this community as a laboratory for testing my hypothesis…" (44). The center now desires to rip the refugees of their loss and present it as shared loss, as sons-soldiers from both sides have been killed. The racial profiling of the community reflects upon Flowerbody's human inadequacy and prejudices that disqualify her as a researcher. McConnachie feels that this inability stems from two factors: first, researchers do not want to recognize a refugee as a rational person and second, their rationality is understood "in competition with or even threatening international ideals and norms" (36).

However, the families in the Camp generally and Mother Dear and Momo particularly resist Flowerbody's teachings because they have to consciously challenge any research that fails to see them, their loss and the injustice of their situation at a human level. The center has marginalized and cornered them enough. They resist by telling their own story. They do not share it with her deliberately, thus refusing

the center any access to their trauma and their ways of dealing with it. They deny the dominant culture of the center any access to their sense of loss because, as Tal sums it up, "If the dominant culture manages to appropriate the trauma and can codify it in its own terms, the status quo will remain unchanged" (7). Consequently, the center's appropriation and codification of their trauma will never allow refugees and their children to go further than their definition of subjects.

Moreover, the text frames Lady Flowerbody's work, just like Ellie's work, within the economic confines of a job. Momo observes, her research is basically her way of earning a living which she is most likely to spend on getting a massage on a nature safari in some African country. He notes, "I get PTSD, she gets her perdiem in dollars" (Hanif 68). However, he refuses to share his loss just to protect his family. He insists, "I have bro Ali's pictures but I am not gonna [sic] show her. I am not giving my family secrets to some visiting surveyor" (68). Similarly, Mother Dear resists her and tells her bluntly that "I refuse to recognize my loss. It will never be my loss" (44). At one instance she categorically questions the researcher: "Are you here to make us feel heroic for losing our son?" (48). Mother Dear knows too well that her and her family's sorrow is incomprehensible to Lady Flowerbody because it is not her loss and she understands "the loss of a loved one" through her "access to some data" (48). But she has not suffered any direct loss, otherwise her reaction might have been like Lara's (Aslam, *The Wasted Vigil*, 2008). Lara is the Russian woman who travels to Afghanistan after the war in search of her brother Benedikt who went AWOL. For Lady Flowerbody, the loss of all the American soldiers killed or missing in action around the world is not hers at a personal level. Although as a researcher it is her opportunity to contribute positively towards understanding refugees' grief, she refuses this while trying to produce work that will sell as the audience back home want to read Muslims as terrorists. She has to situate the Camp population in her PTSD theories. There are national and international distances between her and the sorrows of the families who have lost their sons in senseless wars. Moreover, these distances are filled with ideologies of protection—managing threats to national security—that justify, rationalize and even make people feel proud of innocent people's killing.

Lady Flowerbody, as a representative of the center, and not the first one surveying the camp's refugee population, does not want to acknowledge the limitations in the center's ideology of control that believes it can fathom the "mental health needs" (Hanif 44) of the marginalized Camp population. Whereas, in the Camp, even the refugee children have become so used to the researchers' presence and methods that they have learned to play the subject. Momo can play subject and navigate Lady Flowerbody's questions without compromising his family loyalty. She expects him to be a refugee boy, full of misery and grief over the loss of his brother so that she can declare him a patient of PTSD in need of psychological help. As he notes, "I am a good subject. She is the doctor in the white coat. I am the lab rat quivering in my cage but showing healthy curiosity towards my tormentor. I have done this before. They all come from somewhere" (67).

Olivius, however, observes that "when refugees do not conform to images of passive victims to be acted on and reformed by external actors, they become perceived as threats and the authenticity of their claims to protection and assistance is questioned" (304). Lady Flowerbody's inability to go beyond her conditioned mind and understand Momo as more than a radical Muslim teenager will most likely help in repeating the violent cycle of war in the Camp, here or somewhere else in the world. Her research will declare them as radicalized people soon to be declared as a threat that can be eliminated by dropping a bomb on them. This is the only way the center knows and it helps in keeping the war economy, the weapon industry flourishing and strengthening the economic prosperity of the developed world. It seems as an interplay between the center's academia and war industry: working side by side, one justifying the need of the other.

In addition to that, the center, with all its data and data-driven cold rationality is unable or not willing to see the impact it has upon its own people as human beings. Hanif's refugee camp bares the loss of their ability to empathize. It shows that a failure to empathize towards others' suffering has blinded them even towards their own dead soldiers. The Camp alludes to the center's loss and trauma, too. The center, in the text, is represented through soldiers, generals and researchers in stark comparison to a refugee family. This family—Mother Dear, Momo and even their pet dog Mutt—voice their resistance when the center tries to control their trauma. Their logic is simple. For them, talking about their grief is like, "…selling the souls of" their "loved ones" (Hanif 86). Unlike them, Father Dear, trained and conditioned by the center, has traded many Camp boys with the Hangar. Mother Dear and Momo, on the other hand, do not let "their most private grief" end "as part of the backdrop décor at some fancy wedding reception" or to be used "as a party decoration" (86). This is their logic based on their deep understanding and solidarity towards a son and brother. For the center, this is something that if one tries to "tell them… they'll shake their head as if you are trying to convert them to some Mutt religion" (86). Hence, the center's inability to comprehend others' grief has made it indifferent to its own loss.

The Camp becomes a space of resistance against indifference when it shows its deep understanding of an innocent killing, not just for the refugee family, but also for the slain as a phenomenon never to be forgotten because moving on without making the perpetrator responsible for a wrong means indifference. Arundhati Roy in her text *The Ministry of Utmost Happiness* (2017) has raised this question at a society's level in the background of Hindu nationalism and State's ethnic violence against its non-Hindu population in India. She too, like Hanif, believes that indifference is the biggest challenge to resistance. In *Red Birds* this indifference is manifested at the familial level, with Father Dear's moving on after Ali's disappearance in the Hangar. At a national level, the American government and nation are forgetting the dead or missing soldiers, and at an international level, the world is turning a blind eye towards atrocities committed in the name of different 'isms' throughout the globe. The text attempts to deal with this symbolic entrapment of humanity in the camp of indifference by releasing red birds, to use the American tradition of the sighting of Red Cardinals that might shake their loved ones out of their slumber and make them do something about their unjust killing. Hanif explains the releasing of red birds, thus:

> When someone dies in a raid or a shooting or when someone's throat is slit, their last drop of blood transforms into a tiny red bird and flies away. And then reappears when we are trying hard to forget them, when we think we have forgotten them, when we think we have learnt to live without them, when we utter those stupid words that we have 'moved on.' It is just a reminder that they may have gone but they haven't really left yet. They have not forgotten us. (84)

It is the character of Mother Dear, in the text, who is not "wearing her depression like a badge of honor, but turning it into a subtle form of resistance" (Hanif 81). She, like Roy's Kashmiri mothers who were protesting the forced disappearance of their sons as a result of Indian human rights violations in Kashmir, intentionally ignored by Indian and international media (*The Ministry*), is keeping a vigil of her sorrow and thwarting every worldly effort, as manifested through Lady Flowerbody and her philosophy of moving on in *Red Birds*, or feeling "heroic for losing" her "son" (Hanif 48). She understands that as a mother she has to keep a vigil of her loss even when others think it is not worthy of worldly attention. If Mother Dear's personal resistance through her seven months long crying is compared with Cherokee "Trail of Tears" (Pauls, 2003), it becomes easy to understand that her crying is her tool to keep her missing son's absence alive. In addition to that, it keeps the wrong of his having been sent off along with the wrong of distant war economies alive. Her crying has not let anyone slip into indifference towards Ali's absence because indifference, in Mutt's words "smells like the bleached bones of your fellow" (100) beings and can be termed as the highest form of human treason. It is due to her that no one in the family is oblivious of the

duty the forced disappearance of the elder son entails upon them. They must know what has happened to him in the Hangar.

Red Birds as a contemporary text is significant because it reminds the readers to not become indifferent and invokes the concept of guilt. As Mutt, in his reflections, notes that it is when people become indifferent towards their dead loved ones that they start appearing as tiny red birds on the roofs and walls of their houses. This reminder is in strong contrast to Lady Flowerbody's idea of moving on with life without dealing with guilt, at the personal, national and international levels. Mother Dear and even Ellie, a representative of the center, resist Lady Flowerbody's attempts. Here Jaspers' concept of "metaphysical guilt" applies to Mother Dear, Ellie and Father Dear. Mother Dear has "survival guilt" (Jesper 43) and regrets that she sent Ali alone to the Hangar whereas she should have accompanied him. Ellie on the other hand manifests metaphysical guilt because he being an American pilot was a tool of violence and it was a violation of his "responsibility towards the world and other human beings" (44) who he bombed. Secondly, he and Father Dear have metaphysical guilt by "letting wrongs and injustices happen," because both remained silent "when crimes" against innocent people were committed with their "knowledge" (55). Therefore, in the text they (all the wronged souls) appear as red birds and Mutt says, they "are real. The reason we don't see them is because we don't want to. Because if we see them, we'll remember" (84). It is through their appearance that the duty towards them is reminded. Mother Dear accepts her responsibility in sending Ali to the Hangar. Ellie accepts his responsibility by deciding to help the family find Ali in the Hangar, something he achieves after becoming a witness to the family's trauma.

Moreover, the center's attempts to control the camp through psychological tools essentially remain ineffective due to their, in Baines' words, progressive practice that solely relies upon one theory and does not employ "multiple social justice-oriented approaches" (60) for understanding the refugee loss. Baines, however, does not allude to the fact that by doing so the center loses all the opportunities to fix its own malaise of indifference towards human suffering. This indifference has become part of its own national and global psyche that clearly divides the world on the principle of us versus them or Global North versus Global South. This principle of divide can even be seen in its application in the center's social work efforts at home. Correa-Velez et al. rightly believe that federal or state funding for efforts to promote mental health and well-being of the refugees are limited. Furthermore, they consider that the role of social workers is of paramount importance when they are dealing with a refugee camp's Muslim population.

Hence, it is the principle that needs to be humanized without any racial profiling. Once it has been achieved, the current exclusive approach to efforts for dealing with it will become inclusive. Hanif's portrayal of Lady Flowerbody manifests the limitations in the center's approach to its research about other cultures and people, especially the refugees. She objectifies the refugees as numbers who do not qualify to the normal human treatment. Her cool indifference towards the refugee condition in general and her insistence upon Mother Dear's moving indicate lack of "authentic inquiry" (McCleary and Chaudhry 526) in her work. Both scholars believe authentic inquiry "can result in a more thorough understanding of culture and practice and allow for seeing one as a holistic being as opposed to a diagnosis or the symptoms…" (526). Lady Flowerbody's intent to study PTSD in young Muslim minds is based on her "practice of seeing refugees as other or Muslims" and creates a baseless "misunderstanding and fear" (McCleary 36) about Mother Dear's simple decision to search for her son using all her resources against the Americans in the Hangar as a practice that results in the radicalization of young minds. Thus, she fails to "actively challenge the system that oppresses" (McCleary and Chaudhry 526) the refugees in the camp and back home. Hanif takes the discussion back to the center and bridges the gap between the center and the camp. The Camp highlights the limitations of the center's redressal ideologies because they are exclusionary, mostly informed through the colonial logic of their ancestors.

Camp as a Space for Agency

This section studies the camp as a space for agency to reread the concepts of war and heroism from a mother's perspective, without a political or armed-violent uprising. This part frames Mother Dear's character development in terms of Olivius's "dignity in displacement" and "wellbeing" (304) notions for refugee women. However, it widens the lens to overcome their limitations that read them purely in physical and material spheres, lacking spiritual and metaphysical aspects.

Hanif's refugee camp becomes a space of agency for the mother's character by an inclusion of alternate knowledge systems and indigenous tribal traditions formed through a living with nature principles. Mother Dear can derive inspiration from them and employ tools of resistance that go way farther than the understanding and teachings of the "Cultural Sensitivity 101" (32) course taught to American soldiers by the Central Command during their training. The sheer ignorance of the center towards indigenous knowledge systems that had allowed for a peaceful co-existence of both human and non-human marks its encampment in invisible psychological boundaries where everything that clashes with the center's materialistic identity is intentionally ignored, subdued and rendered insignificant. It is understandable, because an acknowledgement of these knowledge systems would ask for taking responsibility for all the historical wrongs committed towards the indigenous people. Hence, the center has rendered the ancient wisdom useless for them, which can symbolically be seen in the soldiers' handing over of their old Cherokee jeep to Bro Ali.

Mother Dear prioritizes her need to find her missing son (child) because it is essential for her "wellbeing" beyond her need to achieve material security. She associates to Cherokee's ancient wisdom to journey towards her self-discovery coupled with her natural instinct of protecting the sacred fire of love for her child. Mother Dear grieves her decision of sending her son to the Hangar and explains her reasons, thus: "I made one bad decision; it didn't seem like a bad decision at the time. Boys need to go out in the world, so I let him. A proper job in the middle of war. A job that didn't involve fighting. I swear I thought he'd be safer in the Hangar. They had the guns and the alarms and could decide where to throw bombs. He would be better off, I thought, after a bomb came through our own roof" (Hanif 218).

The loss of a child, for her, is an abdication from the sacred fire of love that nature has endowed her with, but her "pain" (Hanif 260) is beyond patriarchy's understanding. It binds mothers in the camp and the center. The center's perspective comes through Ellie's wife, Cath, in the third part of the book. She says that Ellie could not maintain a stable relationship with his her because of PTSD: "He liked his weapon more than his wife. He planned, he scammed. It was always easier to bomb some far-off place than stay home…" (265). He never understood her desire for a child. She recalls that when she eventually became pregnant Ellie told her. "Don't call it a baby… It'll make you feel worse if something happens. It was the closest he came to feeling my pain… So I tried not to remember it as a baby, and when it started bleeding, it didn't stop. And he was half a world away, rearranging the geography of a poor country" (260-1).

Similar to Mother Dear, Margaret Atwood's protagonist in *Surfacing* (2000) laments the loss of her unborn child when she has to undergo an abortion at the insistence of her "fake husband" (44). Mother Dear's recognition of her duty towards her child and the desire to bring him back is to show the world the importance of life she almost died to create. The protection of life as sacred in turn becomes every mother's responsibility that her child learns to protect rather than destroy by killing other people. The contradiction in the center's claims to justify wars when "All the wars in the world are an afterthought about dead children" (Hanif 260), as Cath notes, is the dilemma because contemporary wars are destroying life more than saving it.

It is important to point out here that the refugee camp scholarship fails to read this need because despite several studies and researches, the center's policies have remained unchanged. Hence, Mother Dear's 'declaration of her agency,' as understood by Zolberg et al. in *Escape from Violence: Conflict and the*

Refugee Crisis in the Developing World (1989), is essentially different in character because it rises above every definition of academic rationality. Her act of moving out of her refugee home and going to the Hangar to look for her missing son liberates her of the patriarchal fears: lies about financial security and the center's benevolence that Father Dear fed her with whenever she asked him to find her son. In this respect Father Dear is similar to Ellie. Mother Dear's deliberate attempt is contrasted with Lady Flowerbody who notes, "She wants her son back, who wouldn't?" But going to the Hangar and demanding her son's return "is horror show" (Hanif 253). It demonstrates her incapacity because she does not understand the idea of facing one's child kidnapper, the wrong doer, with all one's might. To her very limited-educated, data-conditioned, rational and Western mind, Mother Dear's action is suicidal. She asks, "Will you get all your family killed to save your son?" (253) Then, she tries to rationalize it as Mother Dear's "tribal thinking" who, in her opinion, "…is a prisoner of her own feudal traditions" (253). For her, Mother Dear "…is not evolved enough" and "[T]his kind of thinking leads to radicalization of young minds" (253). Whereas, for Mother Dear, this decision, albeit emotionally, is the only way to claim her human space while living in a refugee camp. She has been failed by rationality and has to protest against it with all her might. She cannot remain indifferent.

This brings the exploration of a refugee camp as a space of agency to the question of the center's self-proclaimed right to wage wars and kill people. So, who can wage a war? The paper attempts to find the answer from the Cherokee, one of the ancient indigenous people of North America. They had a separate clan named *Aniwodi* who were the "keepers of fire" and responsible for wars that were fought for the "protection of truth and love" (Miller n.p). Whereas, the center's insistence on war just for the sake of war with complete disregard for the sacredness of life—human and non-human alike—raises some very serious questions about the contemporary leaders and institutions as well, who miserably fail with their trust in the center's ideologies and their silence over war crimes. The Camp revives the *Aniwodi* in Mother Dear's character and resistance. She becomes her own leader, with red-henna-dyed hair, a salt dagger and a plastic rosary. She reminds of the Cherokee women leaders, who were powerful, strong and opinionated and made their own decisions. She has dyed her hair red as "…this is her way of getting ready for the big, bad world" (Hanif 213). This association of a woman with the red color is not new to literature, especially when they assume a role other than their oppressive-society-assigned roles. To quote just one example here, I would recall Antoinette, Jean Rhys's protagonist in *Wide Sargasso Sea* (2001) who dons a red dress before burning the English house where her English husband has incarcerated her declaring her mad. Lady Flowerbody and the English husband, the two characters across texts, are similar due to their inability to understand knowledges beyond their own. Furthermore, Mother Dear understands Mutt's silent message when he brings to her that white *dupatta* which she wrapped on Bro Ali's chickenpox infected body after applying one of her traditional remedies for curing him. This display of medicinal knowledge to cure sickness is another of *Aniwodi* characteristics. So, she can wage a non-violent war because her reason is the protection of love.

Hanif's refugee camp opens a space for agency for all those who can accept the responsibility for the wrong they committed in the name of doing their job, as it liberates them from their guilt. Ellie's question "Why should I think of children without hands and feet… half human, half gauze bandages?" (Hanif 179) is significant because his work training aimed at making soldiers "happy killers" with "no conscience or piety; for them the only things worthy of life were… their own kind of human" (Atwood, *Surfacing* 122). The camp, on the other hand, resurfaces his conscience. He poses this question to himself that "Since when doing your job became a crime against humanity?" (Hanif 142) because until that point in his life as a pilot or human being he had never pondered on his job. Whereas, each human action needs a justification at a human level and taking responsibility of the work that basically involves killing, displacing and dispossessing other people, that is, being a war criminal. Ellie asks Lady Flowerbody, "Why can't we

all stay home?" And she replies, "Yeah right, why can't we? I volunteered to come here after you forced these people out of their homes. You should have stayed home" (181). However, they both remain at this level, as the center's representatives, and, unlike them, Mother Dear assumes the power to decide for herself and for her family. She takes it away from the center while never leaving her home in the refugee camp.

For the refugee camp's home space to be able to present and voice a substantial theory of resistance, a thorough investigation of that space is required. McNess et al. call the refugee home space "concurrently liminal" but "navigational" (300). Mother Dear uses it to reconstruct an identity not only for herself but for all the mothers around the globe. Although the idea might sound alien for a refugee mother living in a refugee camp, to be able to demonstrate any agency because in the center's discourse she is voiceless. Moreover, even from the refugees' perspective, such a right to love can only be proclaimed by those who live in peace. Thuy, who fled from Vietnam during the war and took refuge in Quebec, Canada, writes, "If I hadn't lived in the majestic silence of great frozen lakes, in the humdrum of everyday life of peace, where love is celebrated with balloons, confetti, chocolates, I would probably never have noticed the old woman" (41) back in Vietnam. Mother Dear, unlike Thuy, while staying in the Camp, within the confinement of her home, can appreciate love and navigate for herself a role because it is a form of love that does not require any paraphernalia. It is her last opportunity to take action against an international impassivity because she can read the alarm from the Hangar as: "[t]he sound of thousand dead American soldiers screaming their last scream, it rises and falls like their fathers whispering to their dead sons' pictures and then it rises in cacophony, like all the dead from their bombing, pulling themselves out of their graves and trying to tell the stories of their abruptly ended lives" (Hanif 192).

This can be read further with Conlon who believes the assumption of power, by a refugee woman is a "significant facet of her mobility" (353) as a creator. Could there be a theory of resistance that remains non-violent? Or could there be a successful resistance without weapons of mass destruction? A glance at the refugee camps, specifically Middle East, informs that the refugee camps resistance movements eventually turned into violent struggles for power solely reliant on weapons. It is a question that Khoury (*The Broken Mirrors*) has tried to understand in the context of multiple wars in Lebanon. Hanif's character of the mother can understand the pain of life's destruction unlike men. She waits for seven months for her missing son's return. This becomes a time of reflection and makes her announce, "I am not going to sit here with smoke in my eyes, my chipped nails and a bad conscience and wait for a miracle" (Hanif 217). She realizes that she has to come up with her own theory and principle and to ensure that it is not corrupted by men because she says, "[E]nough men have wasted my time" (221) and pronounces her agency. All she has is her salt dagger. It is something that she has saved for mere "sentimental reasons" being a gift from her father. It is a toy weapon that her father gave to her boys. But now it has become her "weapon on the day" (224), she needs it the most. She has saved it even when she had no salt for the meals she cooked. When she goes out to the Hangar to find her son all she cares about is her "son's safety" and it is her "victory." As she says, "That's my entire war plan. That's my ideology. That's my tactics. That's my strategy" (243). She does not go there for any sort of revenge and she hopes to get out of the Hangar "without shedding some poor mother's son's blood" (242).

Red Bird's refugee camp presents a mother's war to take her child back from the center. It is different from the wars that the center wages under the pretext of protecting itself and its people from presumed enemies across the globe and abandoning its own soldiers. Upon entering the Hangar, Mother Dear realizes that the Hangar has been abandoned and there are only ghosts of the dead soldiers, including Col. Slatter's. She accidently discovers the power of her salt dagger when she stabs Slatter with it because he slaps Momo. Instead of killing him, it transforms his ghost into a red bird. Seeing the power of her dagger, all the dead forgotten soldiers' ghosts come towards her so that she can, with "[O]ne thrust of her dagger,"

release "a puff of red dust, no screams, just a flutter of wings and yet another red bird is released into the world. She is the destroyer. She is the liberator" (Hanif 272). It is her understanding of the dilemma of the dead soldiers that elevates her to the position of a true leader. She knows upon entering the Hangar that her "son is not a ghost" because she can look at the soldier "ghosts" and her "heart melts, because they all look like lost sons" (240). She voices their despair as it seems to her that these ghosts are: "[R]eluctant to meet their maker. Life barely began, how can life be over so soon in a place so far away? But they can't go home even when their mothers have left the door open for them… The world is done with them. There is no point in lingering" (242).

It is spirituality as the fourth dimension of resistance which Mother Dear practices through her faith in her love for her son and the fight for it. She is able to understand the misery of the trapped American souls in the Hangar which no one else can. Therefore, she realizes that "[I]nstead of running away they are actually coming towards" her, "in a haphazard queue as if they are lining up at a shrine for a plate of rice and the blessings of a dead saint" (271). Hanif alludes to the role of a saint who can grant liberation to souls because saints practice non-violence and teach love of humanity.

Hanif delineates a marked difference between the men's and Mother Dear's reasons for war. She is essentially non-violent and wants to "avoid unwanted casualties" (243). She specifically makes her intention clear that by standing in front of the army she does not want to be killed because she says, "there are enough of these man-martyrs, always ready to embrace death with open arms" whereas her preparation for the war is "some home economics and common truths" of life (243). She distances herself from the crazy ideology of the Central Command that does not distinguish soldiers from machines. Bernard Shaw in *Arms and the Man* (2016) made this distinction very clear that there is no heroism in wars and soldiers like other ordinary human beings suffer and require food more than ammunition to survive. Ellie, too, refers to the limited thinking that is given to human life in war situations after his crash when he inspects his "survival kit" and realizes that "they give you a 65-million-dollar machine to fly, with the smartest bomb… and if you get screwed they expect you to survive on four energy biscuits and an organic smoothie" (Hanif 3). Hence, Mother Dear's war is "not for revenge" or to "save" her "national honor" or still to "save" her "national anything" (243). Lady Flowerbody, being a USAID consultant considers herself superior to the refugees in the Camp because of her knowledge and situation and does not consider Mother Dear more than an object of despair in need of protection. She cannot realize and accept that for a refugee mother, like Mother Dear, "...the stakes are higher, much higher" because "it is a mother's heart" (207) that has been broken by her child's disappearance and possible death. In comparison to Mother Dear's war, Ellie's engagement in war is merely for "raising his profile" as Colonel Slatter reminds him that in his "profile" there "were no acts of extraordinary valor, no courage-under-fire-type situations" (6). Therefore, Ellie, by no means is trying to protect his country and people from any imminent threat from the "USAID 'fugee camp" (92). It is only to protect himself from an early forced "retirement" because he has realized that the job of a pilot now could easily be done by a "Geek in Houston who remote controls drones, someone who can fight a one-handed war while dipping his fries in barbeque sauce" (5). The irony is he might receive a Purple Heart medal whereas Mother Dear is most likely to be killed for her act.

Furthermore, Mother Dear's display of what Vincet and Sorensen call "response mechanisms during displacement" (3) is quite different from that of the center. She has her plastic rosary for "meditation to protect her spiritual energy" (Amituofo n.p). She has her tears to keep her sorrow alive. She has memories of motherhood as her knowledge of life. She has henna to mark the sacredness of her war. She has a salt dagger as her weapon. Her seemingly simple tools and knowledge help her to develop her own ways of dealing with her situation and enable her to deescalate the effect of "do-gooders" (Hanif 25) as a system on motherhood and womanhood in conflict and post conflict situations. She has sent her son to the Hangar but her wait for his return becomes, in Hoffman's women refugee terminology, "an active process" in

which she "constructs meaning" for her final role as a rescuer and liberator through the negotiation of her "inherited culture and discourses of… protection and livelihood" which enables her an identity "negotiation and refiguring" (1369). Her agency is manifested, first, in her refusal of the identity of a victim due to Ali's disappearance. Secondly, it is observed in her sharp criticism and resistance to Lady Flowerbody's injunctions of moving on and becoming indifferent about it. Lastly, it is seen in her going inside the Hangar, releasing American soldiers' trapped souls and taking her dead son back to put an end to her trauma by burying him according to her religious rites.

Conclusions

Hanif bridges the gap between the center and the camp's teachings through a mother's character by combining the ancient wisdoms of North America and South Asia. The references to Cherokee (Miller n.p.) in the text and Punjabi Sufi poet Shah Hussain 's poem *Mai Nee Main Kinnon Aakhan*[40] (Mother who should I tell) (n.p.) in the epigraph allude to the separation of human beings from their maker, love and reason. The separation that has been brought about in the text between Mother Dear and Ali, mothers and sons across the globe due to senseless wars is hard to end. Mother Dear, just like Hiroko from *Burnt Shadows* (Shamsie 2000), cannot end it but she attempts to bridge the separation. The center's separation, and a panache for violence, on the other hand, seems surreally eternal. Their separation from themselves and their maker has transformed them into beings who have made war a lucrative industry. This is what Dostoevsky defines as "hell" and "…maintain[s] that it is the suffering of being unable to love" (*The Brothers Karamazov*, 343). The soldiers in the Hangar cannot associate to the depth of Cherokee wisdom and thus, have a trapped existence even after their deaths until their souls are liberated through Mother Dear's dagger. Even the humanitarian work, that Pandolfi reads as "military-economic-humanitarian," fails because it entails "mutual indifference" (370) towards refugee suffering. Mother Dear's "refiguring of" her "identity" on the other hand, with her local, traditional and desert resources "is a response to the social-political-cultural consequences of displacement" (Hoffman et al. 1361). Her new identity restores her dignity of a tribal woman who is capable of reciprocating the gifts (Halloway and Grandi, *Dignity in Displacement*), mainly sustenance for survival, she has received from the American people. Therefore, a redefinition of work and jobs based on the simple principle, where, in Harper Lee's words "…every man's watchman, is his conscience" (1), may allow for peace to have some chance (John Lennon and Yoko Ono, "Give Peace a Chance") in the world. Humans become collaborators of killers under certain ideologies of development, self-aggrandizement and civilization without questioning their worth at a human level.

The refugee camps must not linger on as an aftermath of wars and conflicts because with the passage of time they become more vulnerable to human rights abuse and violence. A permanence in refugees' physical exile, despite some noble humanitarian efforts, is more likely to contribute to their psychological exile to self-discovery that begins with taking a responsibility towards their lives. Moreover, there is nothing noble about suffering and those who suffer become cruel. According to UNHCR (The UN Refugee Agency), 6.6 million refugees were living in refugee camps across the world in 2021, and this number is likely to increase manifold due to ongoing armed conflicts such as Russia-Ukraine, the Syrian war, the Yemen war and multiple other insurgencies amidst climate emergency. Hence, *Red Birds* refugee camp might help in restructuring the framework for the future refugee camps and the contemporary principle of security might learn from the ancient African principle of "*ikoni ikubise mukeba uyirenza*" that Sebarenzi

[40] The *Kafi*, a short poem form adopted by Shah Hussain, is a monologue of a miserable child separated from his mother, the sacred love. The child's life has become full of sorrow and pain. The misery will only end when the two will reunite.

translates as: "Throw away the stick that beats your rival, because that same stick can be used to beat you" (156-157).

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Author

Syeda Memoona ALI (Visiting faculty [University of Punjab, University of Lahore, Forman Christian College], researcher, content editor—freelance, consultant based in Lahore, Pakistan), and M. Phil English

Literature. She is currently interested in social, war-related issues. Among her publications are: "The Objectification of Female Body in Margaret Atwood's 'Spring Song of the Frogs'" (*Alizes 37*, University of the Reunion, Faculty of Letters 1 sept. 2013) and "Maps for Lost Lovers Book Review" (*International Research Journal of Arts & Humanities,* Vol. 38, No. 2, Aug. 2010).

Contact: monasaqriz99@gmail.com

Alexandra Maria Rogoz (Ivan)
"Titu Maiorescu" University, Bucharest

~~Mother~~Monsterhood: The Reclaiming of Female Identity in *Nightbitch* by Rachel Yoder

Abstract: Motherhood can be an alienating experience for all, especially when social media veils the unaesthetic facets of caring for the young, turning it into an idealized version of parenthood which gives the illusion that it should be easy, and if it is not—the fault is your own. *Nightbitch* by Rachel Yoder presents this isolating existence through its main character, the mother—whose name is absent from the narrative, narrowing the scope of her identity to that of a caregiver—who attempts to navigate motherhood surrounded by mothers living seemingly perfect scenarios of motherhood. It is only when she starts turning into a dog, or the "nightbitch," as she calls it, that she begins to question her identity and what she is missing.
The present paper aims to analyze the process of the main character of *Nightbitch* in her attempt to reclaim her identity, a process triggered by her body and later embraced by her in her quest to reclaim her life and identity, as well as to strengthen the bond with her child.

Keywords: motherhood, monsters, identity, monstrous mothers, agency

Introduction

Published in 2021, *Nightbitch* by Rachel Yoder describes the metamorphosis of a mother (the mother) into a dog (the *Nightbitch*). The change seems like another betrayal to her identity, at first, a curious thing which is happening to her, instead of a thing she chose for herself. It is only after she embraces the changes and gives in to the animalistic urges that she begins to rediscover herself and to allow the dissolution of the walls built between her and the other moms, which she could not relate to.

The methodology used in the present analysis will take the form of literary analysis and close reading of the text in combination with textual evidence and external sources for the purpose of constructing a nuanced interpretation of the novel with a focus on motherhood, examining the text and extracting meaning from the narrative. The analysis will expand on direct quotes from the novel in order to support its interpretation, incorporating references to external sources, such as interviews with the author and other commentaries, as well as specialized literature on the topic analyzed, for the purpose of providing additional context and insights. Moreover, the paper explores various aspects of the novel, including the monstrous mother trope, the societal pressures on mothers, the protagonist's internal struggles, and the freedom she finds in her transformation into a monster who has broken away from societal norms and expectations. It also touches upon the themes of isolation, guilt, and the intersection of motherhood with societal expectations and media portrayals.

The monstrous mother trope has been present for centuries, however, the general understanding of the trope points to the mother becoming evil and monstrous, causing pain to her family. This monstrous mother is seen as possessing an innate cruelty and selfishness, which determines her to put her well-being above that of her children, which she is supposed to nurture and love. This idea of inherent evil of the mother allows the absolution of the environment in which the mother lives, the context which constrained her to become this monster, therefore allowing a distancing of the perceiver from the notion of causality and what determined the shift from mother to monster, as explained by Palko and O'Reilly: "[..] The Cruel Mother motif has been a recurrent representation in plays, ballads, poems and novels for centuries and

continues to survive in the 'monstrous mother' motif [...] Through the individualising of deviance within the 'monstrous mother' paradigm the media audience, and society, is absolved of responsibility through the actions of the individual" (Palko and O'Reilly 149).

The novel of Rachel Yoder explores this connection between the environment and the identity of mothers, showcasing the strains put on mothers to conform to an unattainable standard: the mother who does not "bounce back" to her career and pre-baby figure, who has "let herself go" and is shameful, while the mother who prioritizes her career and body is seen as selfish and a "bad mother." In *Nightbitch*, however, the monstrosity of the main character allows her to find freedom from these constraining norms as her identity is regained and rebuilt as mother, monster, and artist, living within multiple paradigms which allow the mother the freedom to become an individual again. We can see this aspect mentioned in the novel:

> ONE DAY, THE MOTHER was a mother, but then, one night, she was quite suddenly something else.
> Yes, it had been June, and, yes, her husband had been gone the entire week. In fact, it was his twenty-second weeklong absence that year, a year in which only twenty-four weeks in total had passed, not that anyone was counting.
> Yes, the boy had an ear infection that week and had slept only in fitful bouts. Yes, he had not really been napping well or even at all. (6)

We can see in the above paragraph that there is a strain on the mother of carrying the burden of child-rearing by herself, an isolation which pushes her to the limit, after which her identity and body shifts to allow her to survive the strain:

> There was never enough milk for the baby. He was getting so big. All he wanted was milk, and there was not enough time or milk or hands. The day care closed at six, so no late meetings, must account for traffic, the walk to the parking garage, weather. Do not forget the milk. DO NOT FORGET THE MILK.
> She forgot the milk one evening. [...]
> She sobbed. And the security guard brought her the lost, and found, milk. He delivered it to her car window, because she could not even get out of the car. There was a baby sleeping in the back. She cried as she drove home. (13)

The judgment the mother feels from others is not always present, but her own self-judgment and the judgments she has of other mothers transpires into her own experience of motherhood, turning the forgetting of the milk into a mistake for which she feels extreme guilt, as she feels that she has neglected her son, which she sees so little during the day, and whose only requests of her are her breastmilk and to be held by her as he falls asleep. The judgment is a projection of her own guilt attributed to the guard who found her lost breast milk, and what his response to the milk could have been: "[T]he guard placing the small box in the mini-fridge in his office, shaking his head at the miracle of the find, the kindness of it, or at the mother's loss, or at her lack of care—how could a person be so thoughtless?—or at all of it, all at once" (Yoder 14).

Motherhood today, given the context of social media and global access to information and content, has led to an increased scrutiny of all, but above them, of mothers, whose exposure on these social media gives rise to both toxic comparisons and comments of others subjectively judging the 'appropriateness' of their conduct as mothers.

As Palko and O' Reilly state:

> The idealising and the demonising of mothers has reached an apex in media discourses of recent years positioning mothers as either Madonnas or Medeas. Contemporary media discourse places the ideal mother

> within celebrity news construct where she regains her svelte figure within weeks and seamlessly returns to her career; at the other end of the spectrum the deviant mother is portrayed within news texts as wicked and cruel, the antithesis of motherhood. (149)

As I have stated above, however, the career-woman mother is not devoid of critique from the onlookers, as the caring of the child is still seen as a mother-centric responsibility, deeming the mother as selfish and cruel for neglecting the child by not giving it more attention and time. "Yoder sees motherhood as a force so unfathomable that it can't really be written about using the physiological rules of our universe" (Kelly n.p.). This supernatural aspect of motherhood, the metamorphosis of mother into monster, not in the sense of cruelty, but in the sense of returning to the base understanding of the notion of motherhood, that of animal mothers, allows her to question and transgress not only the societal norms associated with the concept of "mother," but also the internalized constraints she has placed on herself which have led to a deeper isolation. Given that Yoder based the novel on her own experience as a mother, her commentary on her own novel serves as an insight into the matters which she wanted to delineate within the narrative, in an interview:

> She [the Mother] is quite literally a lonely animal. And I was struck at some moments where I thought, like—she does something that I actually don't like that women do, which is to dismiss connection with other moms because they're busy trying to basically distance themselves from the idea of motherhood.
> YODER: Yes. Absolutely. And that was an instinct I saw in myself and also didn't like as I kind of moved into stay-at-home parenting. It was really hard for me to connect with other moms. And I think I had [...] it's sort of like internalized misogyny in a way—right?—this thinking that you're—I was kind of buying in to the story that motherhood is, you know, not—it's nice. It's great that you can be at home. But it's not really of that much value. Moms aren't that interesting. (Cornish et al. n.p.)

This instinct of women, the "internalized misogyny" as Yoder puts it, is also a result of the media exposure mothers are given, where other women become judges of mothers before becoming mothers themselves, a preconception which continues as they become mothers, leading to a desire to not associate themselves with the pejorative perception of mothers. This desire most often leads to the avoidance of association with them, and therefore an intensification of the isolation of the mother. This is also present in fragments of the novel, where we can glimpse the narrator explaining the misgivings of the mother with respect to associating herself and befriending other mothers, highlighting the projected exhaustion and struggle she herself faces, distancing herself from it in an attempt to seem like she herself does not experience the same suffering:

> The problem was, she did not enjoy the company of moms. Certainly, if she happened to meet an interesting, hilarious, beautiful, sharp woman with whom she hit it off and then discovered this woman was a mother, that was fine—more than fine, even. It was wonderful. A wonderful woman she could bitch with about kids. A woman who didn't mind getting a little tipsy on rosé on a Tuesday afternoon. While she would not actively avoid a friendship with a woman because she, too, was a mother, she felt that to begin one merely because of this shared motherhood was repugnant. She found being in a room full of mothers and their wards most dispiriting, each woman clutching her crumpled plastic baggies of snacks, on the way to sniff a diaper to check if the child needed a change, or wielding a tissue like a weapon as she stalked a child to wipe its nose. Those mothers, taking turns staring blankly into the middle distance as their children ran and screamed, peed their pants, knocked into each other, screamed more, cried and laughed and ran… You could always tell a mother by that look, she had come to find, one that encompassed not only exhaustion and boredom, but something more. It was as though the mothers were staring toward something they had lost, something they couldn't even remember. What was it…?" (34)

This last "what was it" is a clear indication that she herself had lost the same thing and was, therefore, in the same position as the other mothers, the only difference being her pride not allowing her to admit it to herself. Given that the idealized vision of motherhood makes it seem easy and "for most women, the reality of motherhood clashes with preconceived notions. It is at the same time more central, more all-consuming, and more difficult than they imagined" (Rogers 258). This difficulty becomes a source of guilt for mothers, who attribute the difficulty of motherhood to something they are "lacking" which would make motherhood easy. This can be seen in Yoder's novel, before the mother's transformation into the "nightbitch," where her exhaustion overwhelms every aspect of her being and restricts her role solely to that of a mother, which is put into perspective with the use of retrospection, the narrator highlighting the two stages of the mother, pre-SAHM (Stay at Home Mom) and post-SAHM: "At the time, when decisions had to be made, she had truly wanted to stay home—she was, in a word, exhausted—though she had never wanted such a thing before. And, honestly, what a privilege. What a treat" (16).

The decision, then, was made while taking into account both the exhaustion she was feeling, being stretched thin between her career and her child, and the financial facet of her career, which ranked below that of her husband. This experience can be isolating, as the strain of work on the other partner further pushes the mother to take on all responsibilities around the household. However, whether she was raising a child herself or taking him to daycare, the exhaustion was at the same level, the only difference being the added comfort of her child: "**SHE WAS NO LONGER** well rested, well fed, well. She was tired and cranky and worried about her body, whether it was changing and what the changes meant" (Yoder 20).

Her experience of giving up her career for the purpose of staying home with the child seems to not have had the desired effect, as caring for the child full-time restricted her access to her passion and career, replacing it with the identity of child-carer at all times. This instance of motherhood presented in *Nightbitch* shows not only the facet of exhaustion, but also the facet of repressed rage and resentfulness at the injustice the character feels at the hands of society, that women must give up their lives for their children and yet, somehow, some women can manage to both be successful and mothers, whilst showing none of the strain she is currently experiencing:

> This meditation she needed to counteract the cud that rose from down in her guts, for it was there, she discovered with a startling pang of nausea, that she had pushed all the anger and sadness, all the disappointment about how her life had turned out. It was there she had buried the talented and plucky young woman with big ideas and an unusual point of view. That young woman was down in her intestines, biding her time, or perhaps dead, suffocated in all the shit. [...] And this was not how *Nightbitch* had viewed herself, not by a long shot, [...] but, sitting at that table, she saw quite starkly, through two glasses of white wine and an entire bale of kale, that she was none of these things and instead was, in a word, insignificant. She saw herself as these other women now saw her, a silent, flabby woman sipping wine without so much as a single exciting comment or opinion to offer to the conversation. She was so uninteresting that they didn't even need to acknowledge her for a good half-hour. It wasn't mean. It was just that she didn't figure into the conversation. (144)

The mother is feeling not only isolated but excluded from all circles, where the mothers she would normally find interesting do not find her interesting enough to pay attention to her, and she is resentful of the ease with which they were able to return to their careers and leave their children with nannies or at the daycare. The repressed feelings she buried in order to cope with the realities of her personal experience of motherhood are almost too much for her to bear, which is where her rage stems from. This aspect of her identity and the relationships with those around her, discussed in the next subchapter, are one of the main triggers of her transformation into the "nightbitch."

Ultimately, the issue stems from the lack of communication from the mother who does not want to acknowledge her guilt and rage at the best part of her life—her child, and the husband who struggles to relate to her experience as he is, for the most part, absent. As was stated in an interview with the author, the issue is that, "the negotiation of those roles needs to go beyond just this simple sort of you do this and I do that. But it's this constant ongoing conversation. And I think—you know, in the book, this mother is unable to have that conversation for a long time until it—you know, something finally opens up for her and she is able to start talking about it with her husband and come out of this sort of rageful silence" (Cornish et al. n.p.).

Motherhood and Identity

Motherhood is often chosen yet what is presented is an idealized version which varies from reality, as what is real is oftentimes not palatable enough to be talked about on social media. Motherhood, most of all, especially for the mother, is an isolating experience in which she feels like there is little to no understanding of her condition from others. Her husband is the prime example given, alongside the aforementioned other mothers, which she cannot relate to. As stated by the author in an interview, on the elaboration of her novel, "[w]e turn to other moms to learn what is correct and how we should engage with our children, [...] [a]nd in my own experience, so much of the performance of motherhood felt hollow or inauthentic to the sort of mom I wanted to be" (Walsh n.p.).

The inability of the mother to relate to other moms would not necessarily become her breaking point, were it not for the other aspects in her life in which she feels she is lacking or struggling to keep up: her career, her romantic life with her husband, her creativity. Moreover, the husband, which she feels should be the one to help her in her struggle, is either not at home, or altogether missing the point of her calls for help, cries which are disguised as her worries for the symptoms of her transformation into a dog. The piece of advice her husband gives her, before going on a week-long work trip (another long trip in a series of many) is most illustrative of the issue: "You really should stop worrying about your hair growth or whatever and get on top of your week, her husband suggested just before he left again, at the end of the forty-eight-hour stretch of time he had been home that weekend. Structure, you know? Make a plan. Draw up a schedule. Treat it like it's your job. Happiness is a choice, he said" (Yoder 21).

The husband suggests that there is a shortcoming on her part, her own mind discouraging her from returning to her previous self, a lack of organization which is standing in her way. Therefore, it is ultimately her fault that she is unhappy and stretched thin. She does believe him, and tries to convince herself of the fact, yet no matter how hard she attempts to return to her "before self" where creativity was her main focus, there is no success, determining her to realize that "[the child] was her only project. She had done the ultimate job of creation, and now she had nothing left. To keep him alive—that was the only artistic gesture she could muster" (Yoder 24). And from that, she extrapolates that her fault in the matter is that "[h]er problem was that she thought too much—'toxic thinking' and so forth—so she tried to stop, but a physical sensation of exertion remained" (27).

From there stem her resentfulness and her unbridled rage with her condition, where she feels not only that she is not understood, but that she is not seen. Moreover, she is beginning to think that her husband is using his time away from the home to relax, and that perhaps he is staying away for longer for this purpose alone, while she is isolated and overwhelmed by the entirety of her life and all aspects encompassed by it:

> That night, as she waited in bed beside the boy, her husband lounged in a hotel room somewhere, reading a book or watching TV or playing video games, eating from a room-service tray laid out on the bed. Even if he was working on spreadsheets or filling out service reports on his laptop, the image of him there, by himself, in a quiet space, seemed luxurious and exotic. In her darkest moments, she imagined that her

> husband craved this time away from them, a wave of relief washing over him each Monday as he pulled out of the drive. Four whole uninterrupted nights of sleep! Blackout curtains! A discrete, achievable task to accomplish that day! A paycheck to expect at the end of the week!
> Did he ever stay away a day longer than needed? Delay his departure from St. Louis or Indianapolis with one more cup of coffee? Anger ballooned inside her as she imagined him dallying on the Internet in a café. He should leave the moment he was finished. He should get up early - as early as she did—and get his work done quickly so that he could rush home. That's what she would do if she were away. (Yoder 27)

This restriction of identity can be seen in the way the narrator refers to the main character, her name never becoming known to the reader in more detail other than the abbreviated "MM" which she uses to sign her letters to the author of the novel that triggers her transformation, *A Field Guide to Magical Women*: "Although she calls herself *Nightbitch*, Yoder only refers to the woman as 'the mother,' an intentional and sharp choice. Who the woman is—beyond a mother—is information erased from the start. *Nightbitch* loves her 2-year-old son who never sleeps, and her husband who takes weeklong business trips" (Snowden n.p.).

The premise is therefore the condition of the main character, whose sole descriptors are that she loves her child, loves her absent husband, and is slowly turning into a dog. Motherhood means losing all identity other than the novel one of "carer," which can feel like becoming unmoored, especially in the context in which the mother becomes isolated from society and career for a period of time that often extends to the time when the child becomes an adult. As Yoder mentions in her interview, the decision of who stays at home with the child is not always related to the gender of the person, but to the income of each parent, and since women most often earn less, they become the ones assigned to the care of the child (Cornish et al. n.p.). This aspect is also brought up in the novel, with the mother highlighting the process of decision-making and the secondary motivation behind it (her exhaustion): "And so, when it had come time to make a baby and then make a decision, it was her husband who made more money and she who made less, which ensured it was she who was made to stay home. It was just that simple" (Yoder 16).

Monsterhood: A Way to Reclaim One's Identity

The transformation she experiences, from being mother to being "the nightbitch," forces her to become selfish in her actions, though not selfish to the extreme, but to the extent to which she needs to be in order to survive and overcome the isolating aspects of her life: "In the distance, she heard her husband in the backyard call for her, but she was not that woman anymore, that mother and wife. She was *Nightbitch*, and she was fucking amazing. It seemed she had been waiting for this for a very, very long time" (Yoder 89). This selfishness also has positive effects on her experience of motherhood, where she finds it easier to relate to her child and teach him independence by playing pretend with him that they are both dogs: "She is becoming a better mother because she is becoming a better dog! Dogs don't need to *work*. Dogs don't care about *art*. Why had this never occurred to her before?" (Yoder 83).

Even more so, when taken into consideration, the "doghood" life seems a freeing alternative to her from the repressed state she was in before transforming into "the nightbitch," where she can do whatever she feels like, even unsightly things like running around the neighborhood naked at night and taking a "monstrous shit" on her neighbor's lawn (Yoder 89). The aggression that comes with it is also a freeing feeling, allowing her to learn her own power and autonomy: "a giddy power surged through her. She was overwhelmed by her strength. She was awash in her own violence" (Yoder 90). Overall, this dual identity she possesses, akin to that of Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde, one meek and law-abiding, one savage and uncaring of societal norms, seems to her more freeing than doomed to fail:

> She *likes* the idea of being a dog, because she can bark and snarl and not have to justify it. She can run free if she wants. She can be a body and instinct and urge. She can be hunger and rage, thirst and fear, nothing more. She can revert to a pure, throbbing state. She had that freedom when she gave birth, had screamed and shat and sworn and would have killed had she needed to. (Yoder 83)

This state which she likens to giving birth is also worth considering, both from the perspective of her transforming, from woman to mother, but also from the perspective of her experiencing a previous metamorphosis that has animal characteristics, the process of birthing itself, when her identity split into that of her and her child:

> Becoming a mother involves doubling not simply of the self but also of the self with the other. We tend to think of the monsters that we have invented as being animals with near-human intelligence. But clearly not every animal is a monster. Originally, we should remember, the word monster referred to a mythical creature that was part animal and part human, frequently of great size and ferocious appearance… Arguably, the body of the mother-to-be contorts itself, restricts itself, becoming both normative and monstrous at once. (Lavoie 74)

Of these negative feelings we learn in "Maternal Rage: Double Dipping in Language and Experience," that "rage is a kind of temporary psychosis;" "uncontrolled," and "violent," it is an affect that overwhelms the ego, often obliterating its function as a mediator, and with it the boundary between self and other" (Kahane 338). Through it, the mother sheds her restraints like an old skin and returns to this base understanding of motherhood, that belonging to the animal kingdom, of a beast capable of anything for her child and for survival.

The monster is not a projection of her sexuality alone; it is not a single-facet element in her life. The increase in her sexual appetite is seen as an effect of her transformation into a dog, however, it is almost unmentioned, sidelined in favor of her perception of society through the eyes of "the nightbitch." We learn of the injustice she feels not only in her household, but in the world she inhabits itself, and what is more compelling is the understanding behind the discrepancy, the attempt to rationalize and repress the frustration, and its ultimate failure, at the way mothers are expected to be and behave. As Traister explains on the matter:

> This view—of anger burning raw and hot, profane and freakish; of the men who controlled the national popular narrative about women, politics and power... brought a jolting realization when I first saw it... that the freakishness was... a by-product of an unadulterated fury. A desperate rage at being manhandled, ignored, sidelined and not taken seriously was driving this group of revolutionaries... to behave outlandishly. (xvi)

Ultimately, what *Nightbitch* by Racher Yoder itself does is question the condition of womanhood and how it is experienced today, unearthing the latent rage and pointing to the fact that all mothers, in some way, experience either repression of feelings or a rage that ultimately erupts. As was put in a commentary on the novel, it showcases "what happens when we turn toward that sort of wild, perhaps rage-filled, feral part of ourselves and move into relationship with it, move into negotiating some sort of understanding with it rather than suppressing it and pretending it's not there and sort of pushing it to the back?" (Cornish et al. n.p.).

The freeing feeling of giving in to the urges and allowing herself to behave outside the parameters of idealized social media motherhood is what allows the mother and the "nightbitch" to coexist so well, their identities melding until a new person is born. As is stated in a review: "[a]t the height of her powers, *Nightbitch*, a canine hunter, does not necessarily find happiness, but instead, something more primal—a

pleasure in killing" (Walsh n.p.). It is only when the mother identity returns to the beast that there is this desire to create, to communicate her experiences with other, and through this escape the iron grip of the loneliness. This duality of existence, mother as creator and beast as killer, shows the circularity of existence and the exhaustive reach of motherhood. The author herself, as stated in the same interview, points to this same circularity: "I was struck by the sort of poetic symmetry of motherhood, where you're literally creating a new life [...] We're so comfortable with that image, but what happens when you examine the other side of it? Not mother as creator, but mother as destroyer?" (Walsh n.p.).

The beast allows her to not only escape her condition, but it also allows her to return to this primal state in which the base feelings of the beast resonate with the emotions of her son, who she previously struggled to understand and relate to. It also allows her to stand up for herself and her seemingly selfish actions, until there is a realization that her isolation was imposed: i.e. her husband was not actively trying to stifle her identity, or leave her alone to care for the child, but in fact he was trying to be as supportive of her as he could, given the limited perspective he had of her experience.

Mother-Monsters: The Pack

Monsterhood allows her to relate to other women and help them as she uncovers their struggles, a change which begins when she encounters another dog which she believes to be Jen, another mother who seems to have her life in order, who is actively hosting dinner nights for other moms in order to entice them to join her 'mothers working from home' lifestyle by joining her pyramid scheme.

By seeing this visceral vulnerability, whether imagined or real, in Jen, she begins to empathize with her and eventually it leads to the other mother confiding into her and admitting that her business has landed her into a debt she does not know how to escape. By forging this bond with presumed-dog Jen she creates what she feels is a pack: a state in which she is no longer the lone wolf (or rather, dog), and with the loneliness of motherhood appeased, she is able to regain her creativity. The unexpected support she finds in her husband is also a stepping stone that she uses in order to delve deeper into her experience to unearth the whole of the "nightbitch."

This creativity materializes into a desire for her to make her violence and aggression as a mother and the "nightbitch" known to others in the form of a public show where she sacrifices rabbits and stalks the audience as if they were her prey, illustrating her rage-turned-animal for all to see and understand as a return to a fundamental state of being as not only a mother, but a beast: uncaring of social mores, a savagely brutal for the sake of survival.

Conclusions

The conclusion that can be drawn regarding the novel is, without doubt, that there is more than meets the eye when it comes to motherhood. Not only to onlookers, but to mothers themselves, to which these repressed feelings can surface suddenly and without much forewarning, the reality of motherhood is far from the idealized versions we see online and from only interacting to the surface level of motherhood. In a nutshell: "In a world where mothers are praised for rebounding to their pre-pregnancy weight months after giving birth and posting images on Instagram of their children building science and math skills before they can walk, *Nightbitch* is a screaming reminder that perfection is not only unattainable, but also corrosive" (Walsh n.p.). In a world where "motherhood continues to be constrained within a patriarchal ideology where women as mothers continue to be categorized, idealized and demonized, and where deviant mothers are understood as 'monstrous,'" it is an act of rebellion, courage and strength to accept the monstrous nature of motherhood and appropriate it as one's own identity, and even more so, to incorporate it as an aid to nurture one's child and strengthen the bond with them (Palko and O'Reilly 149).

What the novel accomplishes is to underline the ease with which a mother's identity can be whittled down to only her duties as a carer for the child, and what transformations a mother must undergo in order to escape such confines of social mores. These transformations range from standing up for oneself, to transforming into a dog and killing one's own housecat in a fit of rage. What this novel teaches is that "[i]f the mask of motherhood 'mutes our rage into murmurs and softens our sorrow into resignation' then a sympathetic, reliable narrator tears off the disguise and expresses her rage and sorrow, uncensored and blatant" (Rogers 258).

Nightbitch therefore showcases a human condition of the present day, where not only are mother pressured to return to work due to financial struggles and fears of 'losing their spark,' but they are also expected to be full-time carers for their children. The term of "working mom" itself implying that childcare is not a labor in itself, which results in the nurturing of children from babies until adulthood. There is still inequality in the perception of women, and there is even more judgment that they are subjected to when it comes to the quality of the care they offer their children. If anything, *Nightbitch* is a testament of all the rage mothers feel when faced with the unattainable standard of modern-day motherhood and the difficulty with which one finds understanding for one's own choices, despite this aforementioned standard being well-known and upheld in society. The extra fur of beasthood is a small price to pay, if a price at all, for the character to regain her sense of self and identity.

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Author
Alexandra-Maria ROGOZ (IVAN) is a PhD graduate from the University of Bucharest with a PhD thesis tackling, among others, alien depictions of society through language. She is currently a teaching assistant at the "Titu Maiorescu" University in Bucharest, at the Faculty of Education Sciences, Communication and International Relationships.
She has attended several conferences in the past, dealing with both translation of science fiction as well as cultural analyses of futuristic societies in crisis, with articles both awaiting publication and already published.
Notable past papers include "Gender Identity in Translation: The Impossibility of Transposing Non-Binary Characters Into Romanian" (*Forum for Contemporary Issues in Language and Literature*, 2023), "The (Mis)Translation of Future English in Cloud Atlas: Sloosha's Crossin' an' Ev'rythin' After," (*Journal of Philology and Intercultural Communication/ Revue de Philologie et de Communication Interculturelle*, 2022), "The Strain of Language in China Miéville's Embassytown: between Multiculturalism, Oppression, and the Alien Society," (*HyperCultura* 2020), "Sonmi~451 and the Image of the Subservient Asian Woman, " (*Annals of the University of Craiova, Series: Philology*, *English*, 2020).

Contact: alexandram.ivan@gmail.com

Nizar Zouidi
University of Gafsa, Tunisia

Dreams and the Non-human in *A Song for Lya* and *Mass Effect*

Abstract: Dreams are sometimes used as a central narrative device in a number of literary works. In modern and contemporary science fiction as in ancient epics, dreams are useful in creating central mysteries that drive the plot forward. As far as the representation of dreams is concerned, the similarities between classical epics and modern science fiction go beyond the plot to the themes. The nature of dreams and their origins are almost the same in both genres. They are structured in a similar manner and are usually attributed to non-human entities that are either benevolent or malevolent. This article studies the relationship between dreams and the non-human in George R.R. Martin's novella *A Song for Lya* (1975) and BioWare game series *Mass Effect* (2007-2017). In this article, I argue that in both works, dreams are portrayed as hostile non-human spaces that threaten the human mind. They subject the dreamers to intense emotional experiences caused by (evil) non-human entities that seek to dominate or destroy humanity. Although the protagonists are not the only special characters in their stories, they are the only ones who are capable of surviving the dehumanizing dreaming experience. Their ability to control and temper their emotional responses protects their humanness. This concept refers to a cultural and ideological category rather than a merely biological one. It privileges a hegemonic model of subjectivity and existence that regards emotions as dangerous and inhuman.

Keywords: Dreams, Human, Non-human, Narrative, Hero

Introduction

This is the year 2183. Lieutenant Commander Shepard is on a reconnaissance mission on Eden Prime, a remote human colony on the edge of the game's galaxy map. On Eden Prime, the squad led by Shepard must fight their way to an ancient artifact from an extinct technologically advanced spacefaring civilization. The mission does not go as planned, the artifact is destroyed, and the explosion knocks Shepard out.

Before it overloads, the artifact imprints a vision in Shepard's brain. The vision from the Prothean beacon—as humans and the other civilized species of the *Mass Effect* universe call it—sets commander Shepard (who has now received his first and last promotion in the game series) on a journey that would ultimately determine the fate of the galaxy. This is how one of the most iconic video games of BioWare starts. The game depicts a world that is too technologically advanced to accept prophetic dreams as a form of knowledge. Yet, it uses a prophetic vision as the central mystery that drives the narrative forward.

Like in *Mass Effect*, dreams are a central plot device in *A Song for Lya* by George R.R. Martin. The narrator and his partner Lyanna are two talented telepaths hired to investigate a mysterious cult on a newly colonized planet. While reading the mind of one of the converts, the narrator experiences an overwhelming vision. Later at night, his missing partner Lyanna, who has already succumbed to the cult, visits him in a dream and attempts to convert him to the Skheen religion. The last dream puts the pieces of the puzzle together. The narrator finally can understand the cult and how it converts humans.

Both in the game and the novella, cryptic dreams and visions sent by non-human entities who—are believed to—have cosmic influence create the central mystery of the main story. This article aims at studying the nature, function and significance of the dreams caused by mental interaction with mysterious non-human entities in both works. It seeks to illuminate the cultural as well as the aesthetic powerplays

involved in the conceptualization and representations of these non-human entities and how they contribute to the enforcement of the dominant cultural paradigms about humanness. The article argues that the humanist values of moderation and temperance are central to the idea of humanness in the two works under scrutiny. What distinguishes Shepard and Robb from the other characters of their stories is their ability to control their emotions. Recognizing and tempering emotional excesses is key to their survival and resistance against the evil forces that dominate others through dreams.

The Ancient Futurism of Dreams

Dreams that have non-human origins are a common literary trope. According to William J. Subash, ancient and Biblical narratives use dreams as "a plot builder" (20). In ancient literary texts, dreams are either good omens or harbingers of death and destruction. They either carry salvation or damnation: "Looking at Near East epics such as *Gilgamesh,* we can see that people from that period developed the belief that dreams could foresee future events" (Ozcan et al. 252). As such, they play a significant role in determining the direction of the main story of the epics.

The narrative significance of dreams also emanates from the fact that they are believed to have non-human origins. Subash divides literary dreams into three categories, namely mantic dreams (or psychological dreams), symbolic dreams and message dreams. While mantic or psychological dreams are caused by repressed memories and desires, symbolic dreams and message dreams are usually ascribed to powerful beings that seek to either save or dominate the dreamers. In this sense, the novella and the game are not essentially different from ancient literary texts.

Moreover, dreams in the two works share many of the structural aspects of the prophetic dreams of ancient literature. Indeed, the dreams of Shepard and Robb can be classified as symbolic dreams and message dreams, respectively: "In symbolic dreams, the message comes in strange symbols that must be interpreted, typically by someone other than the dreamer" (Subash 21). In *Mass Effect*, Shepard enlists the help of Liara T'Soni, an Assari expert in Prothean civilization, to make sense of the message imprinted on their brain.[41] Robb's final dream, on the other hand, has the three components of a message dream, "the setting, the deity that sent the dream, and the dreamer's reaction to it" (Subash 30). First, the dream setting is described as a place that is familiar to the narrator, the beautiful hills of the latter's home planet. Second, after becoming part of the union, Lyanna speaks in its voice. In this sense, she represents the deity that sends the message. Finally, Robb refuses Lyanna's invitation to join the union before the dream ends. As a result, it is possible to argue that the dreams of Shepard and Robb are structured like the dreams of Biblical and ancient narratives.

Probably the only difference between the depiction of dreams in ancient texts and the works under scrutiny is the materiality of the dream-sending entities. "Grounding SF [science fiction] in the material rather than supernatural" (Roberts 5) is a key feature of the genre. It distinguishes it from other fantasy genres such as myths. Nevertheless, this difference is not substantial. While the Reapers and the Greeshka are portrayed as material and accessible to the human perception, their actions are not fully explicable by their materiality. They are not predators by necessity and their survival does not necessarily depend on their destructive influence on their environment. Their actions and role in the imaginary ecology in which they exist and operate cannot be explained by scientific reasoning.

[41] Like in "the Homeric poems, the interpretation of dreams is […] the preserve of respected specialists" (Thonemann 20).

Collective Entities and Narrative Collectivities

In the works under study, the non-human entities that cause dreams are both mysterious and mystical. Their intentions are never quite clear. The Greeshka is incapable of speech. All we know about it comes from converts like Lyanna. The Reapers only reveal the purpose of their existence towards the end of the third *Mass Effect* game.

If the player receives the Leviathan DLC, they[42] can meet the creators of the Reapers who were the first to fall to them. This can be seen as alluding to the story of the Greek gods who destroyed and imprisoned their predecessors, the Titans. Towards the end of George R.R. Martin's novella, even Robb calls the Greeshka "the only God in our universe" (58).

In addition, ritual sacrifices, organized cult or cult-like group activities are the most common manifestations of the influence of these non-human entities on the inhabitants of the galaxy both in the novella and in the game. They are usually feared and revered by the characters that meet and talk to the protagonist, but no one fully understands them or their intentions.

There is, therefore, a religious or at least a quasi-religious significance to the existence and actions of the non-human source of the dreams—another affinity the game shares with ancient and classical literatures. Subash tells us that "dreams are used as a literary device in order to evoke responses that favor parties with political, economic or religious interests" (19). Underlying the nature of the dreams, the dreaming subjects, the dream sending entities and the relationships between them, therefore, is a world-picture that privileges a certain conceptualization of human nature and consigns other forms of existence—including some human races, classes, genders—to collective identities.

One of the most intriguing aspects of the non-human entities in the works under study is that they are rarely seen as individuals. The Greeshka, the Protheans and the Reapers are collective names for insects, insectoids, and sentient machines (whose design is interestingly based on insects like the "leaf insect nymph" (Richardson et al. 34)). Their collectivist nature is not confined to the names. Indeed, the Greeshka is described as "one organism" (50) while the Reaper Sovereign refers to itself as "we," claiming that it is a collective identity ("We are each a nation" (*Mass Effect 1)*). Moreover, they all seek to assimilate or consume the others. For example, the Greeshka consumes the converts and the Reapers transform them into a hybrid entity of organic machines. As such, the identity of the non-human predators is both collective and holistic.

In addition, they have a single purpose and do not have any existence beyond it. They even try to reduce all other forms of existence to that purpose. As the Reaper Sovereign puts it: "We are eternal, the pinnacle of evolution and existence. Before us you are nothing, your extinction is inevitable. We are the end of everything" (*Mass Effect 1)*. They seek to dominate the narrative space by subsuming all the individualized narrative potentialities into their story.

The existence or possible emergence of "non-humans [technologically engendered or otherwise] who may experience and understand the world very differently to humans" (Roden 21) involves two dangerous scenarios. The first is a destructive conflict between the humans and the non-humans and the second is gradual assimilation of the humans by the non-humans.

In *Mass effect*, the Protheans represent both scenarios in a more tacit manner than the Reapers. They may not be portrayed as evil, but they do not respect cultural and biological differences. They subsume the other sentient species and transform them into Protheans. As their empire spans the galaxy, it destroys all the traces of the other civilizations that they conquer. In *Mass Effect 3*, Liara seems appalled when she discovers the cultural genocide the Protheans perpetrated when they dominated the Milky Way. They,

[42] Both the player and the playable character can be of different genders or sexual orientations. For this reason, I avoid using any singular pronouns.

however, also represent a challenge to the process of assimilation. The indoctrinated Protheans in *Mass Effect 2* have turned into a race called the Collectors, but the Reapers failed to transform them beyond that. Even with Javik (The last Prothean), the Protheans remain a single purpose species. In fact, Javik is portrayed as a single-minded character who is the embodiment of the Prothean quest for revenge. He does not change or acquire an individualized perspective despite his brief stay on the Normandy that has proven to be a crucible where non-playable characters are remolded[43] through their interactions with the commander between missions and during the companion quests.[44] Javik remains adamant and even his ability to read the traces of other characters and communicate with them through the exchange of thoughts and emotions does not change his perspective.

Unlike Javik, George R.R. Martin's character Lyanna is overwhelmed by the connections she establishes with the converts. She succumbs to the overwhelming feeling and joins the union. The same feeling is experienced briefly by the narrator:

> Storm, mind storm, yes, it was that. But it was to an ordinary storm as a supernova is to a hurricane, and its violence was the violence of love. It loved me, that mind storm, and it wanted me, and its bells called to me, and sang its love, and I reached it and touched, wanting to be with it, wanting to link, wanting never to be alone again. And suddenly, I was on the crest of a great wave once again, a wave of fire that washed across the stars forever, and this time I knew the wave would never end, this time I would not be alone afterwards upon my darkling plain. (59)

This quotation invokes the experience of psychoanalysis. Thomas H. Ogden describes it as "an emotionally draining undertaking in which analyst and analysand each to a degree 'loses his mind' (his capacity to think and create experience as a distinctly separate individual)" (9). The minds of the analyst and the analysand are later reformed in a third space that neither of them totally controls.

In a similar fashion, the narrator describes the process of reading the minds of others as losing oneself in them. During the vision, the narrator shares his mind with the convert. The vision is a mixture of an external barely identifiable power, the emotions of the convert and the narrator's own desires and longings. The meeting between the external agency and the internal urges renders the dreaming subject almost powerless. So, the narrator interrupts the reading and shuts himself.[45] Just like the psychoanalyst, the narrator must struggle to "retrieve" (Ogden 10) his mind every time he reads the converts.

Dreamscapes as Non-Human Spaces

There have been different interpretations of dreams across cultures and historical periods. Some of these interpretations are scientific or quasi-scientific while others are mystical and not based on scientific reasoning. However, these interpretations converge in their belief in the vulnerability of the dreaming subject. Another dominant presumption about dreams across many cultural and scientific spectra is that "dream images have hidden meaning behind them, and interpretation is required for this hidden meaning to be revealed" (Ozcan et al. 252). The dreaming subject, therefore, has little control and understanding of their dreams. It is in dreams where the human mind is most vulnerable.

[43] The most collective form of subjectivity on the Normandy is Legion. However, when "he" sacrifices himself to bring peace between the Geth and their creators, Tali morns him as an individual and the scene of his death is so emotionally charged that the player may forget—at least for a while—that he will return to the collective mass AI consciousness called the Geth.

[44] Special missions designed to earn the loyalty of a specific squad member.

[45] Lyanna fails to do the same and is eventually converted.

This vulnerability explains the centrality of dreams to the narrative structure of *Mass Effect* and *A Song for Lya* where the non-human predators use dreams to take control of their victims. In *Mass Effect*, the Reapers are described as being able to warm their way into one's brain through dreams. In *Mass Effect 2*, Shepard must board a derelict Reaper. The squad watch video logs left by the science team that was sent to study the ship. The logs reveal the different stages of the crew's indoctrination.[46] *Mass Effect* uses environmental storytelling to procedurally unveil how "the dead Reaper" gradually invades the dreams of the crew that was sent to study it. One of the video logs describes the Reaper as a dead god that dreams:

> Chandana said the ship was dead. We trusted him. He was right. But even a dead god can dream. A god? a real god? is a verb. Not some old man with magic powers. It's a force. It warps reality just by being there. It doesn't have to want to. It doesn't have to think about it. It just does. That's what Chandana didn't get. Not until it was too late. The god's mind is gone but it still dreams. He knows now. He's tuned in on our dreams. If I close my eyes, I can feel him. I can feel every one of us. (*Mass Effect* 2)

This Lovecraftian description of the derelict Reaper ship as a dead god resonates with Robb's conclusion about why humans are converting to the Shkeen cult in Martin's novella:

> They have found God, or as much of a God as they are ever likely to find. The union is a mass mind, an immortal mass mind, many in one, all love. The Shkeen don't die, dammit. No wonder they don't have the concept of an afterlife. They know there is a God. Maybe it didn't create the universe, but it's love, pure love, and they say that God is love, don't they? Or maybe what we all call love is a tiny piece of God. I don't care, whatever it is, the union is it. The end of the search for the Shkeen, and for Man too. We are alike after all; we're so alike it hurts. (57)

Both descriptions invoke the works of Howard Philip Lovecraft. The Reapers seem to be inspired by the great old ones,[47] deities from space who have fallen into a deathlike sleep. In *Mass Effect 2*, the Reaper ship is a defunct machine with less than basic functionality. The Greeshka—in *A Song for Lya*—also corresponds to this model. It "hasn't even a yes-I-live" (23), the minimum amount of intellectual activity for a creature to be deemed sentient in the novelette.

Lovecraft opens his famous *The Call of Cthulhu* with the following sentence: "The most merciful thing in the world, I think, is the inability of the human mind to correlate all its contents" (1). This is because of the resistance and denial mechanisms that humans generally have when it comes to sharing their thoughts and emotions even with themselves. They prevent the humans from being consumed by their desires and emotions—literally or otherwise.

Valcarenghi, the colonial administrator in *A Song for Lya*, overuses these resistance mechanisms. He is described as excessively rational and reserved. At the end of the novella, when his lover Laurie leaves him, he only says: "Laurie is a beautiful person, and I will miss her. But it's no tragedy. There are other beautiful people. I think she was getting restless with Shkea, anyway" (59). When the narrator reads him, he finds "a vague disappointment. And below that, his wall. Always the wall, keeping him apart, this man who was a first-name friend to everyone and an intimate to none. And on it, it was almost as if there were a sign that read, THIS FAR YOU GO, AND NO FURTHER" (59). Valcarenghi is a closed personality. He sets boundaries that no one can cross, including himself.

[46] In *Mass Effect*, this term is used to designate the process where the Reapers take control of their organic victims and eventually transform them into mindless Reaper creatures such as the human husks.

[47] In fact, Legion and the Geth in *Mass Effect* 2 and 3 call them the old machines, which is an allusion to Lovecraft's old ones.

The narrator and his partner fail to find these boundaries in the converts. Lya describes their minds as "so deep" (21) but at the same time "open" (35). While reading them, the narrator describes the feeling as "real and fervent" (21). The converts do not seem to be in control of their emotions. Their minds have no defensive mechanisms. Moreover, their vulnerability is contagious. Robb has to switch on his defense mechanisms every time he reads the converts. He experiences the same feeling of vulnerability in the dream where Lya tries to convert him to the cult of the union. Once again, he manages to shut himself up in the nick of time and refuses to succumb to (her) temptation.

At the end of the novella, Robb refuses the solution of Lyanna because he believes that it is not human. He also refuses to be like the colonial administrator. He reaches the conclusion that "Man has two primal urges, and the Shkeen only one? If so, perhaps there is a human answer, to reach and join and not be alone, and yet to still be men" (59-60). The two primal urges are fear and desire. The narrator describes humans as afraid of love and union but at the same time craving it.

Temperance and Being Human

A similar in-between-ness is also underscored by commander Shepard in different conversations, especially with Reapers and indoctrinated organics. *Mass Effect* portrays its protagonist as a temperate character for three reasons. First, "it is always intellectually stimulating to find that you are positioned in the interstices of two different worlds" (Davies 5). This makes the choices of the player more significant. Second, the player does not control all the main character's words and actions, because it is "an entity shared by the player and the game system" (Christensen and Jørgensen 183). As a result, Shepard cannot be allowed to stray too far from the middle ground that no matter what the player chooses in the dialogue options, the choices remain consistent with Shepard's overall personality. Finally, as the champion of humanity, playing as the commander allows the player to go through a wide range of emotional experiences without losing sight of Shepard's distinct personality. Their identification with the character cannot be total but it should be gratifyingly fulfilling. Similarly, Robb should be able to understand both Lyanna and Valcarenghi without being like them. As a result, the reader and the player can identify with both protagonists and enjoy extreme emotional experiences from a safe critical distance. Implicit to both works, therefore, is the belief that emotional and moral excesses—whether in the positive or in the negative sense—are dehumanizing.

In classical and medieval Western thought, the human is deemed to be a middle ground between two extremities. As Thomas Aquinas puts it, "there must be virtues between the exemplary or divine virtues and the social or human virtues. These virtues are differentiated by their motion and goal; some are virtues of men on the way of tending toward divine likeness, and these are called perfecting virtues. So, prudence by contemplating divine realities, does not overestimate things" (380). In this quotation, Aquinas divides human virtues into purely human virtues or social virtues and perfecting virtues. The latter allow humans to strive for the unachievable goal of divine perfection while the former prevent them from falling into subhuman degeneracy.

The novella and the game show that moral and emotional excesses are still seen as non-human and they are usually attributed to the racial, biological, cultural, and religious other. This explains why the narrator describes humans as more complex than the Shkeen who are portrayed as having only one urge. The narrator also describes other imaginary alien species as governed by certain forms of emotional excesses: "I read aliens before. Sometimes it was difficult, sometimes it was easy, but it was never pleasant. The Hrangans have sour minds, rank with hate and bitterness, and I feel unclean when I come out. The Fyndii feel emotions so palely that I can scarcely read them at all. The Damoosh are… different. I read them strongly, but I can't find names for the feelings I read" (19). In this quotation, each imaginary species is

reduced to an exaggerated single aspect of human subjectivity. The aliens mentioned may be different from each other, but individual members of the same race are presumably identical.

Similarly, in *Mass Effect: Andromeda*, the audio logs on the Archon's ship describe the humans as "the most perplexing [of the Milky Way species]. They possess an emotional range which often exceeds the others. Their unpredictable nature marks them as dangerous" (MEA). The internal diversity within humanity makes them difficult to subdue. Unlike the humans, the other Milky Way species—or races as the game characters call them—are described in oneiric terms. Each race is given a single trait. For example, the Turians are extolled for their militaristic discipline (emphasized by their Roman-like names and ranks) and the Krogan are described as a "brutish race" (MEA) characterized by "a savage temperament—made to kill" (MEA).

In both works, only the humans have inherent individuality. Although the non-human crew of the Normandy start to show individual traits as they interact with the player-character, these characteristics can be ascribed to the influence of the human commander.[48] In this sense, they are created rather than discovered. The commander's influence is to temper the excessive trait of the other species. Grunt, the Krogan, describes the process in his: "Ha! See, now we're having fun. Me remembering good deaths, and you with your... funny human thing you're doing" (*Mass Effect 2*) and his "Thank you, Shepard. You gave me purpose. Now let's find something big to kill" (*Mass Effect 2*).

The humanization of the aliens on the Normandy is to tame their excesses and channel their energies to serve human purposes and values. Implied is an equation between these excesses and the non-human. This entails a unification of the concept of the human by making it synonymous with temperance. Humanist thinkers such as Francis Bacon, Emmanuel Kant and John Stewart Mill consider temperance as a cardinal virtue that distinguishes humans from other species. Even Charles Darwin believes that it is a defining characteristic of the human species. For him, it is key to the survival and evolution of humanity. He argues that with "increased experience and reason, man perceives the more remote consequences of his actions, and the self-regarding virtues, such as temperance, chastity, &c., which during early times are, as we have before seen, utterly disregarded, come to be highly esteemed or even held sacred" (165). For Darwin, Humans are characterized by their ability to imagine, predict and assess the short-term as well as the long-term consequences of their actions. They are also self-aware—they have developed conceptualizations of what it means to be human (beyond the biological sense(s) of the term).

Temperance, in Darwinian theory, is a condition for human survival. Darwin describes intemperance as "so highly destructive" (72). Humans are supposed to find a middle ground where they can satisfy their urges and needs without endangering themselves or their species. In *A Song for Lya*, Lyanna and the other converts lose their humanity, because they fail to be temperate and embrace an extreme solution to their (cosmic) loneliness. On the other side of the coin, the seemingly cold-hearted Valcarenghi is ultimately rejected by his most devoted lover who joins the narrator in seeking a human answer to their longings. This implicitly excludes him from the category of the human.[49] Only humans who can control their urges and temper their emotions can be considered humans and deserve to be followed. This establishes an emotional hierarchy that implicitly favors the humanist model of the temperate person.

[48] This shows that Christensen and Jorgensen's argument that the companion character can be considered a "prosthetic" (184) extension of the player character extends beyond gameplay. They become narrative extensions of the player character personality through interactions and dialogue choices.

[49] His position as a colonial administrator is also significant. He represents a cultural paradigm that has started to be condemned at the time when the novelette was first published. Lyanna can also be considered a representative of certain communalist social ideologies that were in vogue at that time. This article cannot elaborate on this because of spatial considerations.

The Hero's Battles Are in Their Minds

In the game and the novella, dreams are portrayed as non-human not only because they are induced by non-human entities, but also because they are characterized by excessive and overwhelming emotional and mental experiences. Dreams subject the dreamers to intense emotional experiences. These experiences are usually dominated by a single feeling. If the dreamers give in to that feeling, they lose their humanity. They need very strong mental capacities to survive and retain their humanity.

Shepard's brain activity is usually described as being "Off the chart" (*Mass Effect 1* and *2*). The player character's "experience of [their] mind" (Ogden 141) is usually beyond the normal. When Liara tries to join her mind with Shepard's, she feels overwhelmed and faints. Ironically, the experience is too intense for her 100 years old brain.

Likewise, Robb is one of the talents. He can read the minds of others, be they human or non-human. He shares the memories and the emotional experiences of those he reads. He and Lyanna experience love and sex in a more intense manner than normal humans. However, when Lyanna reads the minds of the converts, she realizes that this super-intense experience is not enough for her. She wants to go beyond it and experience true union. When she tells Robb, he refuses to cross the limits of what he believes makes him human. She then leaves him and joins the cult. Knowing that he has lost her, he still does not succumb to the cult. He rather continues to look for a human solution to his (cosmic) loneliness.

The protagonists are not the only ones who can perform extraordinary feats, but they are the ones who retain their humanity in the process. Saren (who is not human in the first place) might be the better SPCTR, the Illusive Man seems to be the better leader (at least until he is indoctrinated) and Kai Leng is obviously the better fighter, but Shepard cannot be indoctrinated. The commander is even able to convince the archetypal mind-controller Leviathan to join the fight against the Reapers.[50] Lyanna is the better telepath, but Robb does not succumb to the Greeshka. Every time his mind is invaded, he shuts himself at the last moment and prevents the non-human from taking over.

The hero who resists foul temptations is a familiar archetype in knightly romances.[51] These stories usually represent dreams as misleading. In the first book of the *Fairie Queene*, the wizard Archimago tricks the Redcrosse Knight into thinking that Una is unchaste using a false dream. Although the knight continues his quest, he loses faith in the justice of his cause. As a result, he initially loses the battle against the dragon. People can be manipulated by heathen or hellish creatures in dreams—they can also be visited by divine messengers in dreams and visions. Throughout the centuries, literature in many cultures has represented dreams as a space over which we have little control. It is not a human space. Dreams have long been associated with the non-human. They are the domain of gods, demons, alien parasites, and old machines. The dreaming subjects themselves are not human. When they dream, they surrender their minds to a non-human entity. Even after the appearance of psychoanalysis—and other related scientific disciplines—dreams remain non-human spaces because they allow for excessively intense emotional experiences. Both in the novella and the game, waking up allows the protagonist to retain their humanness. Humanness, therefore, is a wakeful state.

[50] In a way, Shepard indoctrinates the arch-indoctrinator.

[51] The bells of the converts and the Reapers' mysterious sounds (originally, the sound of a trashcan opening and closing)—that some of the game fans believe to contribute to indoctrination—are a less direct allusion to the story of Ulysses and the sirens. The allusion becomes more obvious as—like the protagonists of the game and the novella—the king of Ithaca is the only one who listens to the sirens and returns.

Conclusions

In the two works under scrutiny, dreams are portrayed as a dangerous form of biological as well as cultural otherness. They represent a space where the human as wakeful consciousness recedes and almost disappears. It is an uncontrollable event that may threaten the integrity of the human mind. The real victory of protagonists occurs within their minds. They distinguish themselves from the other characters of the story by being able to retain control over their minds. Their temperate personalities protect them from falling into the grips of the non-human predators. In the works under scrutiny, humanness is depicted as a moral and cultural category rather than a biological one. Indeed, temperance is represented as the defining trait of the human subject. If a character loses this moral value, they lose their humanity. The two works confirm a privileged cultural paradigm through the character of the protagonists who survive non-human temptations and retain their humanity.

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Author

Nizar ZOUIDI is assistant professor of English language and literature at the university of Gafsa, Tunisia. He is the author of several articles and book chapters about characters in Renaissance drama and other literary periods and genres. Nizar is the editor of a collection on villainy in Anglophone literature published

by Palgrave Macmillan in 2021 and is editing a new collection about monarchs in world literature and arts for Routledge.

Contact: Nizarzouidinizar@outlook.com

Suchitra Rani Mahato, Rajiv Bhushan, & Maninder Kapoor
Department of Humanities, Social Sciences and Management, NIT Jamshedpur, Jharkhand, India.

Draupadi's Disrobing and the Male Gaze: A Feminist Perspective on the Digital Adaptations of the *Mahabharata*

Abstract: The epic Mahabharata has been adapted into varied genres—theatre, dance, movie, fiction, and television serial. This paper shall focus on two televised versions—one directed by B. R. Chopra and the other by Siddharth Tewary. Interestingly, both are simultaneously available and comparable through the research-friendly digital archive of YouTube and Disney+ Hotstar. The scene of "Draupadi's disrobing" in the "Game of Dice" episode is the climactic scene of the epic that signals the inevitability of the war of Kurukshetra. Using digital apps, and a close examination of the visual medium this paper shall attempt a comparison of the damning and shaming of Draupadi and her subsequent defiance in the face of male arrogance in the "Game of Dice" episode as presented by B. R. Chopra in 1988 and later by Siddharth Tewary in 2013. It shall identify points of similarity and departure to comment on the diverse messaging strategies employed by the respective directors and argue whether they hammer in different messages. If the message is the same, which director is more potent in establishing it? The paper shall also showcase the power and potential of the visual medium in demonstrating the toxicity of the male gaze in action.

Keywords: Mahabharata, Draupadi, Digitization, Representation, Male Gaze

Introduction: Digitization of the *Mahabharata*

The epic *Mahabharata* was written between 400 BCE and 200 CE. Consisting of 100,000 stanzas, the epic poem is considered to be seven times longer than Homer's *Iliad* and *Odyssey* put together (Doniger qtd. in Lodhia 792). Even though the authorship of the epic is a debatable issue, it is generally ascribed to Veda Vyasa who dictated the verses to Lord Ganesha. The enormity and grandeur of the epic have always drawn the attention of the masses—both Indian and diasporic. Contemporary writers and artists have rewritten and adapted the epic myth of the *Mahabharata* in various narrative forms showcasing different viewpoints (Garcia-Arroyo 14). The most important is the televised adaptation of the epic in the audio-visual medium. Despite the great time span since the epic was written, it has always attracted audience attention in present day India. The most obvious illustration can be found during the COVID outbreak in 2020, when B. R. Chopra's *Mahabharat* was broadcast on television to help people overcome their dread of the ongoing pandemic and to help them develop moral and ethical values (Saxena n.p.). It garnered high TRP (Television Rating Point) as people once again gathered to watch it despite having prior knowledge of the content initially popularized when first broadcast in 1988. The show was released on cassettes, CDs, and DVDs and is now available in digital format on YouTube. When the BBC (British Broadcasting Corporation) aired the B. R. Chopra televised adaptation of Vyasa's *Mahabharata* in English, the Indian ethos infiltrated the homes of the erstwhile colonizers in a novel and unexpected way, fusing the popular imaginations of an island and a subcontinent separated by thousands of miles (Bhattacharya 248). Five million people watched the *Mahabharata* when the BBC broadcast it in the UK at a midday time slot.

Televised mythological stories are a well-known and wide-ranging form of popular culture within India and throughout the diaspora. They offer a visualization of the epic that can be readily consumed by audiences across the globe. It is interesting to note the number of attempts made at digital representation of the *Mahabharata* in recent history. Mythologist Devdutt Pattanaik was able to retell the entire *Mahabharata* in thirty-six tweets. The *Mahabharata*'s eighteen chapters and one hundred thousand verses were condensed into thirty-six tweets, which took roughly forty minutes to read (Storypickers n.p.). Similarly, *Dharmakshetra* is a mythological drama series which aired on *The Epic* Channel. The series is set in the aftermath of the battle of the *Mahabharata*. All the episodes are available on streaming network *Epic On* (Netflix). The epic was subsequently adapted into a computer animated historical drama film in 2013. Numerous Bollywood celebrities, including Amitabh Bachchan, Sunny Deol, Ajay Devgan, Anil Kapoor, Jackie Shroff, Vidya Balan, Manoj Bajpayee, and Deepti Naval, provided the voices for the characters in the film, which was produced by Kushal Kantilal Gada and Dhaval Jayantilal Gada and directed by Amaan Khan. It is available on YouTube (Pen Bhakti). *Ancient Voice*, another online resource, founded by Jijith Nadumuri, has 23,000 pages on the *Mahabharata*, *Ramayana*, four *Vedas*, and *Vishnu Purana*. It employs a *Wikipedia*-style structure with billions of linkages creating a network of names, which makes cross-referencing relatively simple. Yet again, John Brun Hare's hard efforts have enabled the availability of a digital resource, namely Kisari Mohan Ganguli's English translation of the *Mahabharata*, which may be downloaded as text files from the *Sacred Texts* website. Another enormous online resource is B. R. Chopra's *Mahabharat*, a popular television rendition of Vyasa's grand epic, the *Mahabharata*. Despite its great success, many subsequent attempts have been made by various artists to imbue it with new charm. In this regard, to mention the names of three other versions is important: Chandraprakash Dwivedi's *Ek Aur Mahabharat* (*One More Mahabharat*, Zee TV 1997), Ekta Kapoor's *Kahaani Hamaaray Mahabhaarat Ki* (*The Story of Our Mahabharat*, 2008), and Siddharth Tewary's *Mahabharat* (2013-2014).

However, to exalt a specific version as unassailable truth in the face of multiple and varied interpretations would be misleading. The ethics and politics of the various retellings of the Hindu epics have been and continue to be the topic of considerable dispute. In this context, it is essential to mention that Ekta Kapoor's *Kahaani Hamaaray Mahabharat Ki* failed for being too loud or boisterous, and for inconsistencies between its actor performances, and Chandraprakash Dwivedi's *Ek Aur Mahabharat* was taken off air after only fourteen episodes for being too subtle and realistic in comparison to the stylized dramatic acting expectations from the epic (Roy 254). People were astonished to see the scene of "Draupadi's disrobing" in the very first episode of *Kahaani Hamaaray Mahabharat Ki.* In an interview with a news organization, Ekta Kapoor confessed to using the scene to grab the audience's attention. Many viewers believed that the ambitious idea was not properly studied to be presented, while others believed that the visual attractiveness of the presentation lacked authenticity. Due to low TRPs and overwhelmingly bad reviews, it was taken off the air after only four months (Patokar n.p.). The inveterate actor Mukesh Khanna, best known for his role as Bhishma in B. R. Chopra's *Mahabharat*, was very outspoken about his opinions and principles. The actor denounced Ekta Kapoor for making fun of the classic saga, *Mahabharata*, in a video uploaded to one of his social media pages. He criticized her for modernizing the plot of the *Mahabharata*. He also took issue with Ekta's depictions of the Pandavas displaying six-pack abs and Draupadi sporting a tattoo (Tiwari n.p.).

Draupadi and the Male Gaze

This paper will examine two *Mahabharata* adaptations that focus on a key female figure named Draupadi, whose character is appropriated and reinvented in varied genres—film, drama, dance, art and literature (Luthra 147). "Draupadi's disrobing" in the episode of the "Game of Dice" in the royal court of Hastinapur is one of the most well-known scenes of the *Mahabharata,* possibly drawing maximum

attention from the masses. Even people with less knowledge about the *Mahbaharata* know the name of Draupadi and the incident of her disrobing. This scene is the best example of gender discrimination and violence against women that people very often cite to condemn the obsessive victimization of women. The manner in which her character is portrayed in various versions and adaptations is itself interesting and revelatory. This paper will deal with the most dramatic and theatrical sequence of "Draupadi's disrobing" in the "Game of Dice" event in the *Mahabharata*. Draupadi being the focus point of this scene draws our attention for her courage in questioning the long-established notion of *Dharma* (righteousness). She questions patriarchy's sense of entitlement over the right to pawn a woman as an object or chattel in a game of dice. Draupadi, the common wife of the Pandavas and the enigmatic heroine of the *Mahabharata*, has been the target of the male gaze on numerous occasions, specifically during her *swayamvara* (a ceremony where a bride chooses her husband), where she is offered as a trophy that the victor might win during her humiliation in front of the entire royal assembly, and during her subsequent molestations by Jayadrath and Keechak. Every time Draupadi enters the male-dominated public realm, she is reduced to the one-dimensional identity of a material body, and her evaluation is limited to a description of her physical characteristics. She becomes an object of the male gaze and of sexual desire.

The phrase "male gaze" was first coined by feminist film theorist Laura Mulvey in her 1975 essay "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," published in the *Screen* magazine. The introduction of the essay has a significant relevance to how women are represented in the media, on screen, and in other kinds of entertainment. Women have historically been depicted in cinema and television as erotic objects, both for the on-screen characters and the intended heterosexual male audience. Mulvey contends that women are "looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*" (62) (emphasis original), suggesting that women are not given roles in which they can direct a scene but are only positioned for objectified observation. Essentially, the male gaze views the female body as something heterosexual men may observe, conquer, possess, and use to achieve their interests. Patriarchy is to blame for the male gaze because of the inherent disparity it creates between men and women. Additionally, the scene of "Draupadi's disrobing" in front of the royal assembly reflects this patriarchal viewpoint. Mulvey contends that using another person as a visual, sexual stimulant results in the pleasure of "scopophilia" (59). According to Mulvey, the way our society is built up, with men playing an active role and women performing a supporting function, creates gender polarization.

Laura Mulvey's theory of the "male gaze" finds concrete embodiment in the innumerable and immediately available versions of Draupadi. Of all available versions, this paper pits BR Chopra's 1988 version of Draupadi against Siddharth Tewary's 2013 version in the attempt to establish similarities and differences in intention and execution. Do both attempt to deliver the same message? How and why do both attempt to shock and awe the audience into an acknowledgement of the toxicity of the male gaze? How are they different? These are some questions that this analysis shall attempt to answer.

This paper employs a descriptive and analytical methodology, including a close analysis of "Draupadi's disrobing" sequence in the televised versions of the *Mahabharata*. Materials from secondary sources are accumulated to understand the sequence comprehensively. The secondary sources include articles, E-journals and various web sources. This research is conducted within a comparative framework using Laura Mulvey's "male gaze" theory. Initially, the discussion focuses on the more popularized version of the *Mahabharata* as recounted through B. R. Chopra's televised adaptation. Next, it talks about Siddharth Tewary's televised adaptation, which, in contrast to the B. R. Chopra version, uses a subversive form of representation to persuade viewers to reconsider the significant moments in the "Game of Dice" episode from Draupadi's perspective.

"Draupadi's Disrobing" in B. R Chopra's *Mahabharat*

Produced by B. R. Chopra, and directed by Ravi Chopra, *Mahabharat's* first episode was aired on Doordarshan on October 2, 1988. It had ninety-four episodes and the final instalment of the series was aired on June 24, 1990. Rated 8.9 / 10 on IMDB, *Mahabharat* is considered a gold standard in popularity for TV series (Bharadwaj n.p.). Episodes 46-49 contain the "Game of Dice" episode and its aftermath. Every episode is preceded by the voice of the metaphorical narrator "Time." "Time" not only appeals to the viewer to critically engage with the scene, but it also introduces the plot of the story within which the characters are placed. It reveals the outcome of the story, and ends with a message to the viewer. The narrator considers Draupadi's humiliation as a cruel reality that the viewers would be forced to witness. Episode 47 begins with the narrator's monologue that self-consciously reflects the binary opposition of good and evil in which characters are placed according to their deeds. In the "Game of Dice" episode, Draupadi alone stands on the side of the good while the other elders and the Pandavas are on the opposite side. The episode begins with Duryodhana's resentment at Yudhisthira's success in becoming the Emperor of the entire Bharatbarsha. Duryodhana, Shakuni, and Karna devise a plan to reduce the Pandavas to bankruptcy through a game of dice at the court of King Dhritarashtra. Yudhisthira bets first, and stakes his wealth. After losing all his wealth and his kingdom, he stakes his brother Nakul without any prodding from the Kauravas. There is no disagreement over the practice of staking a human being. He eventually loses all of his brothers and himself. He now wants to stop the game. It is then that Karna convinces him that he still has Draupadi in his possession and he should stake her. Yudhisthira readily agrees to stake Draupadi and ultimately loses her. After winning Draupadi, Duryodhana declares that Draupadi is now reduced to the status of a maid, and orders a guard to bring her to the court. Draupadi dismisses the guard, demanding an answer to the question of whether Yudhisthira staked her before or after losing himself. Duryodhana orders her to come to the court and ask the question herself. Draupadi disobeys his directive and declares that she would only follow the advice of the elders. Being enraged by Draupadi's defiance, Duryodhana commands his brother Dushasana to bring her by dragging her hair. Dushasana barges into Draupadi's chamber and forces her to come to the court. Draupadi repeatedly requests him not to drag her in such a barbarous manner as she is menstruating and dressed improperly. Draupadi's repeated appeals to Dushasana, and her concerns about her attire make her body a site of oppression. Meenakshi Thapan, in an article "Gender, Body and Everyday Life," says,

> It would appear that the female body could be experienced as both celebratory as well as oppressive. […] We however experience our bodies as oppressive when our desires remain unfulfilled and we see this unfulfillment reflected in the other's gaze so that if we do not have shapely, well adorned and well clothed bodies, we feel not only depressed and alienated from our bodies but also experience the situation as oppressive. (33)

After giving an aerial shot of Dushasana pulling Draupadi by her hair to the court, the camera swings around to show the close-ups of men: Duryodhana and his accomplices' leering faces, Draupadi's husbands' helpless rage as they sit with their heads bowed and their backs to her as she is dragged in, and the distress and shock of the elders. Duryodhana urges Dushasana to force Draupadi to sit on his lap. The vulgarity of Duryodhana's order further widens the voyeuristic male gaze that leers at Draupadi. After a protracted struggle, Draupadi manages to break free of Dushasana's hold and runs towards the king. The elders are bowed in shame as the camera follows her gaze to their faces. Unrelentingly, she accuses them of being accountable for the *Adharma* (misconduct) because they failed to stop it from happening. Draupadi questions Yudhisthira's authority to stake her in front of the elders, specifically Bhishma, Drona, Vidura and King Dhritarashtra. She glances directly into the camera and addresses the audience, creating a moment of connection with the spectators.

The scene of "Draupadi's disrobing" is also the strategically significant moment when the narrator brings in the gendered notion of women's rights. The legal point of Draupadi's argument relies on the ground that if Yudhisthira has already lost himself, he has no right to Draupadi. If he did not lose himself before he staked Draupadi, then he would have the right to Draupadi. The main point of Draupadi's argument has some limitations. She considers herself the daughter-in-law of the Kuru dynasty and the daughter of King Drupad. Since she is a daughter-in-law, the nation's honor resides within her, and her honor should be protected. She speaks frequently of her virtue, which even the wind and sun have never dared to touch. She is therefore completely humiliated by her exposure to the public. Suddhabrata Sen Gupta, in the article "Sexual Politics of Television Mythology," says, "All these arguments suggest that a woman who does not have Draupadi's qualities can be bartered away" (2560). Although she initially poses her question as a daughter-in-law, she eventually expands her identity by posing herself as the woman of the entire nation. Mankekar contends that Draupadi's personality makes her a symbol of all women, and that her humiliation is a representation of societal demoralization. Writing about the effect the serial had on middle-class female viewers, Mankekar explains: "…the disrobing scene made them relive personal humiliation in their families, in their offices, in the public spaces of New Delhi. It powerfully brought home to them their vulnerability as women. Even, as they acknowledged the power of her rage" (255).

Draupadi incites some prospective openings for critical discussion about gendered violence. She rejects Shakuni's proclamation that Yudhisthira has lost her: "Who is he (Yudhisthira) to lose me? Even if he has the right to lose his wife, I am not his wife alone. I am married to the five brothers" (Episode 47, 26:06). Bhishma protests feebly and rather indecisively that Yudhisthira should not have staked her, and that a husband has a right over his wife. Draupadi rectifies the definition of "right" to entail defending her from shame rather than staking her as a prized asset. An indifferent Karna demands instead that she comply with Duryodhana's command to sit on his lap since her husbands have failed to defend her, and that having a sixth husband should not be a problem because she already has five husbands. Karna further humiliates her with his scathing remarks: "A woman who lives with five husbands is not a wife. She is a whore! And a whore has no honor. It would not be improper to bring her here nude" (Episode 47, 29:30). To make Karna's words come to fruition, Duryodhana instructs his brother Dushasana to strip her down because he is eager to see how she appears in the nude. Draupadi tries to escape Dushasana's hold as he clutches her. The Kauravas' raucous laughter and jubilation make the horrifying scene seem worse. Dushasana charges at Draupadi and grabs her sari. Her shaking, perspiring body is captured in voyeuristic detail by the camera. She struggles, pauses, and begins to humbly pray to Lord Krishna while holding her sari.

Dushasana's lust ridden voyeuristic gaze is shown by medium-close-up scene. All the Kaurava brothers except Vikarna become excited with the pleasure of scopophilia as they gawk at Draupadi with their lascivious male gaze. On the one side, the Pandavas are shown to be hanging their heads low in their dismal incapacity to protect their wife, and on the other side, the Kauravas are shown to be gawking at Draupadi with their lust-ridden male gaze. Roshni Sengupta, in an article, says, "Draupadi's humiliation, therefore, symbolizes the debasement of the Kauravas and the decapitation of the masculinity of the Pandavas" (9). Dushasana keeps yanking her sari to the loud mocking laughter of Duryodhana and his supporters, "Pull Dushasana! Disrobe her!" (Episode 47, 32:06). But, very soon, the ringing of temple bells and conch blowing serve as the background music, drowning out the sounds of their laughter. The visage of Lord Krishna appears in the upper-left corner of the screen. He looks down at Draupadi with a beatific and consoling smile as garments start to flow out of his hand, which he lifts in blessing. The sound of conches, temple bells, and the voice of Draupadi's imploring prayer to Krishna pervade the scene for a while. The sound abruptly changes to an exuberant style that expresses the melody of victory. Dushasana collapses on the ground from exhaustion after failing to strip Draupadi. The background music stops when

Draupadi likewise falls to the ground. Draupadi's unkempt hair and disheveled clothes are testimony to male aggression in gross violation of women's honor. Enraged by the silence of the elders at her predicament, Draupadi starts to utter a curse, but the Queen mother Gandhari interrupts her and begs her not to curse her beloved sons. King Dhritarashtra begs her forgiveness and is ready to grant her a boon. Draupadi wants to free Yudhisthira from slavery through one boon and demands the freedom of her other husbands through another boon. Dhritarashtra wants to give her more, but she rejects all by proclaiming, "That would be greed, my kind King. A warrior's wife cannot ask more than two boons" (Episode 48, 14:16). Draupadi's rage is thus appeased, and she accepts the King's offer to negotiate.

The portrayal of Draupadi by B. R. Chopra provides some potential avenues for critical argument regarding gendered violence, but largely reinforces hegemonic gender relations by endorsing patriarchal codes of conduct. The implications of the B.R. Chopra portrayal of Draupadi are significant. Since the camera focus is repeatedly on Draupadi as victim to the tyranny of male abuse, as squirming subject to the male gaze, or as female body open and vulnerable as a declared site of oppression, there is a deliberate attempt to gratify the male gaze. Draupadi voices a strong protest, challenges the legality, points out the *Adharma*, blames the elders, declares herself as a repository of national honor, but receives no support. The conflict between *Dharma* and *Adharma* nauseates, but male posturing insists on the right of a man on his wife. A woman can be slave to a slave. Even a slave can have complete jurisprudence over his wife. *Dharma* cannot dispute the rights of a man to pawn his wife. *Dharma* cannot halt the disrobing of a woman if it is as per the terms and conditions of a male-owner wager. The only hope for redemption is through divine intervention. In the court of mortals, woman has the status of property. B.R Chopra endorses the status quo.

"Draupadi's Disrobing" in Siddharth Tewary's *Mahabharat*

Produced by Siddharth Tewary, the TV serial *Mahabharat* was aired during 2013-2014. Yet another mythological serial, it is easily accessible on Disney+ Hotstar. The show garnered an opening viewership of 8445 TVTs (Television Viewership in Thousands), which means that around 8.4 million people watched it on September 6, 2013, the day it debuted. The show garnered a weekly rating of 6356 TVTS (6.3 million viewers). According to Debashish Mukerji in *India Today,* September 23, 2013, "A Star India spokesperson [CEO Uday Shankar] claimed that *Mahabharat* has garnered the highest TV ratings among all TV shows in the last three years" (n.p.). While on the same day, in *Business Today* the CEO spoke about "other online platforms as well: 'Our aim was to reach out to the youth through *Mahabharata* and with online receiving good traction, we have succeeded in our attempt'" ("Mahabharat' Garners Impressive Viewership Numbers, n.p.).

Pooja Sharma plays the role of Draupadi, displaying myriad emotive layers in her sensitive portrayal of the legend. Tewary's Draupadi is unique in heralding a new type of female protagonist—a survivor of sexual violence who is simultaneously a superheroine who demands that her questions be answered. In Tewary's version, the purpose of Duryodhana and his cunning uncle Shakuni is to defraud the Pandavas of their kingdom via deception through a game of dice. However, the insult to Draupadi is the main reason for conducting the game. In the course of the scene, this insult takes the form of a repulsive act committed against a woman's modesty and the purposeful denigration of a lady who is the princess of Panchal, the Empress of Bharatbarsha, and the eldest daughter-in-law of Hastinapur. Throughout the entire game, Draupadi is shown to be updated with the news of what is happening in the game. As the game starts and Yudhisthira keeps losing his wealth at every turn of the game, she becomes impatient and anxious. The game takes a devastating turn when Yudhisthira loses his youngest brother and Draupadi's fifth husband, Nakula. Draupadi tries to stop the game, unlike other televised adaptations (such as B. R. Chopra's *Mahabharat*) in which she is shown more powerless when given the tragic news. Here, she tries to right

the wrong with the remaining authority she still has as the Empress of Bharatbarsha. This is a reaction born of love, but manifested as heroism as she rushes to her husband's aid as a loving wife. Draupadi's boldness is further demonstrated by the fact that she is the only one in King Dhritarashtra's court to make a concerted effort to halt an injustice and to assert that she will not leave until the game is over. Yudhisthira and Dhritarashtra eventually ask her to leave the court, citing propriety laws. Draupadi leaves in anger, and locks herself alone in a room. While the Queen mother Gandhari, who also could have stopped the game, chooses to lament in the hope that other family elders will right the wrong, it is Draupadi's character's defining quality of courage that prompts her to step in to stop an injustice. Both women have a reputation for being upright, but their divergent responses to the same provocation serve as a reminder of the prominent personality attributes that Draupadi and Gandhari each possess, namely courage and compassion respectively. Eventually, Yudhisthira loses all his brothers and himself. Under the provocation of Shakuni, Yudhisthira stakes Draupadi and loses her. After winning Draupadi, Duryodhana orders an attendant to bring Draupadi to the court. She, in turn, orders the attendant to return to the court and tell Duryodhana that "Empress Draupadi refuses to be lost by Yudhisthira in the game of gambling. If Yudhisthira had already lost himself in the gambling then he had no right to stake his wife" (Season 15, Episode 10, 19:35). Upon hearing of Draupadi's defiant refusal to comply, Duryodhana deputes his brother Dushasana to drag her by her hair to the court.

Dushasana barges into Draupadi's chamber, but she refuses to be cowed down by mere threats. She pulls out a sword and makes an effort to fight off Dushasana. She shoves him aside and walks over to the Queen mother Gandhari's chamber. Instead of running away, she walks with dignity. Dushasana physically prevents Draupadi from going into Gandhari's room and drags her to King Dhritarashtra's court by her hair. Such violence against a woman ordinarily elicits anger in the angry, or grief in the compassionate, but when it is committed by a younger brother-in-law against an older sister-in-law, the reaction shifts to contempt. The fact that the elders present in the court, especially Bhishma and Drona are both uniquely capable of defending Draupadi, but choose to do nothing out of helplessness, merely adds to this disdain. Draupadi struggles a lot, but Dushasana grabs her by her hair and throws her to the ground of the court. Duryodhana delights in seeing the face of Draupadi conveying "When one's pride is destroyed, it is the face that is blackened first" (Season 15, Episode 11, 21:52). When Draupadi raises her face for the first time to survey the silence and inaction of every man present in the court, the fire of rage is emitted from her eyes. Draupadi raises a question about the practice being conducted at Hastinapur court. She questions Bhishma's silence on seeing this kind of behavior happening right in front of his eyes. She talks in terms of women's right to property, declaring that it is the society that gives a wife the right to her husband's property. The kingdom's law gives her that right. She receives those rights as soon as she is married. When Yudhisthira put his property at stake, she too had a right to it. He should have taken her permission, but he did not do so. She asks her husbands, one by one, if Yudhisthira had asked for their permission before he staked her. Arjun begs Draupadi's pardon and conveys that they never go against their elder brother's order. At this, Draupadi shows her resentment in her anguished monologue: "Everybody in this court has followed righteous principles. So, does the true definition of righteousness permit men to exploit women? Everybody has considered doing what is right in his manner, but no one has bothered about my honor, my rights, or my feelings" (Season 15, Episode 11, 11:20).

Duryodhana very crudely orders Draupadi to come and sit on his lap. When the elders' appeals to stop this injustice are dismissed, and they are humiliated or coerced into silence by Duryodhana, the horror is heightened even more. Draupadi listens to the discussion, at first with sadness at the elders' helplessness in the court, then with rage as Karna and Duryodhana insult her, and finally with disgust as she realizes the futility of the debates in which everyone is attempting to defend their inaction through self-serving interpretations of *Dharma*. Her tone shifts from sorrow to rage as she questions their passivity, their

silence, and the value of their morally dubious understanding of *Dharma*. Draupadi refuses to obey Duryodhana's order. She does not consider her status to be that of a maid. She is a fiery spirit born from the holy fire of *yajna*, and fire can never be bound by anything. She says, "Independence lies within oneself, Duryodhana, it is not a piece of clothing that one can snatch" (Season 15, Episode 11, 02:49). Enraged by Draupadi's audacity, Duryodhana contends that independence cannot be snatched, but clothes can certainly be, and he immediately orders Dushasana to disrobe her. Arjun becomes so enraged by Duryodhana's utterance that he puts off all the lights by throwing a dice, declaring that just the way the court has been immersed in darkness, the Pandavas would fill the life of the Kauravas with darkness. Bhishma, Drona, and Vidur do not remain silent at this moment as they try to stop Duryodhana from such misbehavior which has never happened in the court earlier.

Duryodhana again issues his order. All cry out in protest to stop this injustice. Draupadi asks everyone to be silent. She knows that the courage to stop this unrighteousness in the name of righteousness resides with none of them. They do not have the power to stop the deeds of wicked people. None of them have understood the true form of righteousness. If she is to be protected, then the Almighty himself will protect her. Instead of running away from Dushasana, she summons him to use his strength against her. Draupadi's innate bravery, which had previously guided her self-defense reactions, is heightened to a state of heroism, creating the conditions for an extraordinary act of bravery, and evoking wonder amidst her on-lookers, at her ability to maintain personal calm amidst such acute provocation. Then, similar to a true devotee, she surrenders herself to the divine God, closes her eyes, and begs Lord Krishna for help. Draupadi then invites Dushasana to carry out his brother's directive to strip her. As Dushasana, with his lascivious male gaze and a desire to relish the moment, approaches Draupadi to pull one end of her sari, a miracle happens to everybody's amazement. Now, as Dushasana tugs at Draupadi's never-ending sari, yards of sari begin to cascade down from all sides to mask her humiliation. The coils of unending sari finally compel him to faint from fatigue. When Draupadi eventually opens her eyes after the miracle of the endless sari comes to an end, she is in a state of tranquil prayer and has no awareness of the activity or of the spectacle around her. Draupadi's body is visually framed within the middle of the assembly. Rather than being reduced to an object of visual and sexual gratification, Draupadi exudes divinity as a halo pervades her, and her body is shielded from the male gaze through the kindly intervention of multiple garments descending from all corners. As Dushasana falls to the ground in exhaustion, the male gaze succumbs to a divine spectacle when every man present in the court witnesses the miracle in utmost amazement. Unlike the B. R. Chopra version, this scene amplifies the shameful repercussions of violating a woman's honor as the upper garments, crowns, and jewelry of every man present in the court start to untie and gather at Draupadi's feet. Tewary's version deliberately shifts the focus from Draupadi's body to the bodies of men as they become partially nude. This shift of focus turns our attention towards the bodies of these virile men. In this representation, the heroic bodies of men have turned into sites of shame traditionally associated with the female body. The stripping of men in public is a deviant portrayal of the male gaze that aims to enjoy the 'scopophilic' pleasure of watching Draupadi's disrobing. As the narrative brings its viewers to one of the epic's most spectacular moments, Draupadi's face is lit up to manifest and elicit wonder over the serenity she can gather amidst such upheaval. When Kunti tries to console her, Draupadi stops her proclaiming, "I am no longer your daughter-in-law. I am neither your son's wife nor the bride of the Kuru dynasty. I am not a human being but death! I am the death of all the wicked men in this unrighteous court" (Season 15, Episode 13, 13:56).

Chastised by the disgusted response of his wife, Queen Gandhari, by the irate warnings of Kunti, and by the fear of Draupadi's curse, King Dhritarashtra finally pleads for Draupadi's forgiveness and requests her to ask for a boon. She asks for the freedom of her husbands from slavery, and then asks him to return their weapons. The Pandavas's power had been snatched through treachery. Draupadi asks Dhritarashtra

to return their power, and he agrees to fulfil her demand. At this point, another debate takes place as Duryodhana rejects Dhritarashtra's order to return the Pandavas' property. Enraged by the indecisiveness of men, Draupadi curses, "Duryodhana will be punished for his sins. But before that, all the people present at this court will be punished for staying silent. This is a curse by Draupadi, the one born from a sacrificial fire" (Season 16, Episode 1, 18:21). Draupadi then departs with a victor's gait. She overcomes her victim status and compels men to lower their heads with her unwavering female gaze. Her fiery spirit and outrageous utterances at the royal court make her victorious. She makes every man in the court realize that the men attempting to besmirch her honor are the ones who should be ashamed, not she.

It may be argued then that Tewary's version of Draupadi is more heroic, more courageous, more defiant, and more assertive of her honor, rights, and feelings. She exhibits a stronger will to act, to intervene, to interrupt, to change the course of events. Right at the beginning, when Yudhishtra loses Nakul, she tries to halt proceedings. She has to be forcibly removed from court on grounds of propriety. Later, when Dushasana wishes to drag her to court at the nefarious behest of Duryodhana, she uses a sword in protest, but when beaten, walks with the dignity befitting a queen. She builds an argument to protect herself, categorically asserting a woman's rights to her husband's property. Her husband cannot legitimately pawn property which is hers as well. And yet perhaps, her crowning triumph is when Krishna sends yards of sari to shield her from dishonor while the men in court shed their garments, weapons, crowns and jewels. Roles are reversed. It is the men who are disrobed and defanged. She is the victorious Empress, and the female gaze is imperious and peremptory enough to level and lower the male gaze.

Conclusions

The immense popularity of both B. R Chopra's *Mahabharat* (1998) and Siddharth Tewary's *Mahabharat* (2013) conveys a strong message. Though separated in time by twenty-five years, their potential to rouse an audience remains unfazed. Both serials have enjoyed sky-rocketing TRPs. In addition, the fact that their popularity spans centuries also reflects the burden of the patriarchal baggage they have carried. The epic's televised versions aid in accentuating the graphic brutality of Draupadi's terror and powerlessness in all its poignant pathos. In a sense, both serials reflect the temper of the times that produced them. Both T.V. series excel in spectacle—a spectacle that is deliberately engineered to pander to the male gaze. In both versions, Draupadi expresses her distress at being turned into a spectacle. Simultaneously, she expresses her fury at the elders, who are oblivious to her suffering. In both versions, the male gaze (both of the audience and on the screen) gloats in misogynistic delight at the spectacle of Draupadi's humiliation. The male gaze in the audience views the male gaze in action on the screen. Finally, it takes the divine intervention of Krishna to deflate the male gaze. Significantly, in this same scene of "Draupadi's disrobing," Vyasa, the author of the epic, describes the impact of Draupadi's appearance on the Kauravas, who are overwhelmed with the evil desire to possess her. He does not, however, discuss how ignominious it is for Draupadi to be the object of the voyeuristic male gaze. The male author's interpretation of this scene, which downplays Draupadi's feelings in the circumstances, is criticized by Draupadi's voice in the epic's televised versions. In this sense, it may be argued that the televised versions do attempt to give a voice to the debased woman.

However, it would be feasible to demonstrate how B. R. Chopra and Tewary's approaches to presenting and visualizing parallel scenes from the *Mahabharata* deviate from one another with the aid of digital archives. B. R. Chopra's description of the scene adheres to the customary representation of the moral and ethical implications of the hegemonic narrative regarding the notions of consumption and absorption. In B. R. Chopra's version, Draupadi's body is endowed with some cultural determinants. She is unable to free herself from societal confounding. The scene where Draupadi declares her reluctance to enter the

assembly hall depicts her as helpless. She begs Dushasana repeatedly not to drag her away to the court because she is menstruating and dressed improperly. When Draupadi is brutally taken into the assembly hall by Dushasana, she conveys how shameful it is to be observed by men while only wearing one piece of clothing that does not completely cover her body. This shame-inducing question seeps into the female brain the instant a woman's body is exposed to the male gaze, making her scramble to find a place where the male gaze and its associated humiliation will not be present. By having Draupadi make the fervent request to let her go to the haven of the women's chamber, B. R. Chopra makes this implication. Her concern about her clothes makes her incorporate a third-person point of view. Here, she is anxious about her outward appearance as that may subvert her well-cultivated image of an ideal wife and daughter-in-law. Rather than dwelling on her humiliation, she is worried about her disorderly dress that may disgrace the long-term fame of the Kuru dynasty. In the heterosexual socio-cultural framework, B. R. Chopra's presentation exemplifies how women are reduced to non-thinking, non-speaking objects. Draupadi establishes her identity in relation to the patriarchal kinship structure, where fathers, brothers, husbands, and other family-ruling men act as the arbiters of women's existence. Here, Draupadi thinks that if she does not establish her identity in these terms, she will not be able to have the desired effect. Tewary's Draupadi, in contrast, asserts her individuality and declines the protection of the venerated name of a patriarchal relation.

Women maintain the status of the “looked-at object” in the traditional representational system, whereas men acquire the role of the spectator. All forms of gazing can benefit from Laura Mulvey's research, which examined the theory of representation in the context of cinema. B. R. Chopra emphasizes this aspect of "to-be-looked-at-ness" in his portrayal of this incident where Dushasana tries to disrobe her, and she struggles to cover her body by holding her sari. Her struggle to cover her breasts and other body parts is a spectacle with overtly sexual undertones. The quality of "to-be-looked-at-ness" that Laura Mulvey (62) describes is evident in Draupadi's body as it looks to be a sexualized object aimed at masculine voyeurism. The aftermath of Draupadi’s disrobing has greatly influenced the psyche of her character in two different ways. In the case of B. R. Chopra’a *Mahabharat*, Draupadi is shown in a very pathetic condition as she hides her face in shame after her attempted disrobing. Here somehow, she succumbs to the male gaze and body shaming. In contrast, Tewary’s version has the power to undermine patriarchal norms and values by utilizing more subversive and feminist ways of representation. Tewary’s Draupadi is very much aware of her social prestige and position. She proclaims an autonomous identity that nobody can snatch from her. After the attempted disrobing, she becomes vulnerable, but she regains her spirits, and finds an outlet for her anger by uttering a terrible curse upon the Kauravas. She is the only person who can raise her head in pride, forcing the other persons to lower their heads in shame at their inability to stop an injustice being done to a woman. She confronts the male gaze that reduces women to the status of an object of sexual desire. Tewary alters the parent narrative's gender bias by introducing a distinctly feminist point of view that will force the audience to re-examine the well-known events in Draupadi's life. This is done by his representation of Draupadi drawing out a sword in her self-defense and bringing about the disrobing of men in public view, that is, by giving Draupadi the authority to direct the action. She actively challenges her situation rather than being a passive bystander. She is seen being informed of everything that is going on in the court during the entire scene and rushes there to put an end to injustice whenever she deems it necessary. She demonstrates her strength of defiance and resistance when she pulls out a sword to fend off Dushasana. She does not display shame about her messy look even for a moment; instead, she makes her victimizers feel ashamed for their cruelty against a woman. Tewary presents a reversal of the customary representation by turning the focus from Draupadi's body to the failure of the Kauravas in their attempt to disrobe her. Most importantly, not only the Kauravas, but all men present in the court are subjected to shame about their bodies in the scene where their garments

come loose. It is not Draupadi who is shamed, but the men who are reduced to emasculated travesties of themselves. The deviant portrayal of the epic scenario demands for a critical re-evaluation of the events.

Thus, it may be argued that Tewary is able to significantly alter the patriarchal narrative. The attempt to disrobe Draupadi fails miserably through timely divine intervention. Again, it is divine intervention that ensures that the powerful antagonists with their shameless male gaze lose not only their garments and their ornaments, but also their weapons in full view of the female gaze. Divine justice defangs the toxic male gaze while simultaneously appeasing the female gaze. Roles are reversed. Draupadi becomes the spectator while the men become the spectacle to be looked at.

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Authors

Suchitra Rani MAHATO (Corresponding author) is a Research Scholar in the Department of Humanities, Social Sciences and Management at the National Institute of Technology, Jamshedpur. Her areas of research interest include Hindu Mythology, Gender Studies and Indian English Women's Fiction. She has presented papers at several National and International Conferences. She holds an MA from Banaras Hindu University.
Contact: 2018rshs004@nitjsr.ac.in.

Dr. Rajiv BHUSHAN is an Associate Professor in the Department of Humanities, Social Sciences and Management at the National Institute of Technology, Jamshedpur. He also served as an Assistant Professor

in English at the Faculty of Languages, Sana'a University, Sana'a, Republic of Yemen, for five years. He has thirty-two years of teaching experience and twenty years of research experience. His areas of research interest include American Literature, British Literature, Business Communication, Linguistics and Gender Studies.
ORCID ID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3646-2181
Contact: rbhushan.hum@nitjsr.ac.in

Dr. Maninder KAPOOR is an Assistant Professor (Retd) in the Department of Humanities, Social Sciences and Management at the National Institute of Technology, Jamshedpur. Her areas of research interest include Indian English Women's Fiction, Feminist Narratology, Postcolonial Studies, and Gender Studies.
ORDCID ID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-5859-3879
Contact: mkapoor.hum@nitjsr.ac.in

Navin Sharma & Priyanka Tripathi
Indian Institute of Technology, Patna (India)

Scripting Justice: Intersecting Law, Culture, and Gender in Hindi Cinema's Portrayal of Domestic Violence

Abstract: Domestic violence in the Indian context becomes complex with the interplay of law and prevalent socio-cultural dimensions vis à vis women. This article analyzes the representation of domestic violence in select Hindi films: *Agni Sakshi* (*With Fire as Witness*) (Ghosh, 1996), *Daman: A Victim of Marital Violence* (*Subjugation: A Victim of Marital Violence*) (Lajmi, 2001), and *Mehndi* (*Henna*) (Khan, 1998). These films conceptualize the legalistic matter of domestic violence in two ways: one, in the form of battering, sexual, emotional, and verbal abuse by a psychopathic husband, and two, as family violence caused by the social evil of dowry. By exploring the fictional screening of the issue of domestic violence, this article analyzes how such depictions have been co-related to contemporary legal discourses. Our article investigates how films contribute to the understanding of domestic violence within the context of legal matters and reveal the underlying feminist or patriarchal values. Through textual analysis of the film texts, we hypothesize that they often reinforce patriarchal narratives by portraying domestic violence as isolated incidents related to husbands' psychopathy or dowry issues.

Keywords: domestic violence, dowry, Hindi films, women, Indian law

Introduction

Since its inception in 1913, Indian cinema has been loyal to addressing social causes. Ashish Rajadhyaksha considers Hindi cinema, or Bollywood, the "most prominent culture industry in modern India" (32). During the 1990s, at the advent of liberalization and globalization, the Hindi film industry was influenced by both the "universalizing and particularizing trends" (Matusitz and Payano 69). The decade made the family drama genre popular in India through Hindi cinema (Tere 4). According to Derné, seventy percent of these family dramas depicted the mistreatment of women through sexual harassment, battering, rape, domestic violence, and so on ("Making Sex Violent," 552). Though these films criticized violence against women in home spaces, the patriarchal institution of marriage has "implicitly being patronized in the sense that the victim wife refuses to leave her husband's house despite severe physical and emotional violence by a rationale of leaving the marital house only at the time of her death" (Tere 3). While analyzing the depiction of sexual violence in Hindi films from 1997-99, Ramasubramanian and Oliver find that male aggression and violence towards women characters are shown as normal and legitimate (328). However, Afreen Khan notes that the 1990s brought a radical shift in the role and depiction of women in Indian cinema (51).

Hindi films during the 1990s and early 2000s, including *Yaraana* (*Friendship*) (Dhawan, 1995), *Daraar* (*Rift*) (Abbas and Mastan, 1996), *Agni Sakshi* (*With Fire as Witness*) (Ghosh, 1996), *Raja Ki Aayegi Baraat* (*The King's Entourage Will Arrive*) (Gaekwad, 1997), *Mehndi* (*Henna*) (Khan, 1998), *Daman: A Victim of Marital Violence* (*Subjugation: A Victim of Marital Violence*) (Lajmi, 2001), and *Lajja* (*Shame*) (Santoshi, 2001), took up the widely debated issue of domestic violence as their core theme. They reflected different forms of abuse that Indian women face within their households. These films depicted the domestic sphere and marital relationships as abusive and violent, challenging the stereotypical screening of marriage in Hindi films (Bollywood) as a romantic and idealistic union. Almost all protagonists in the above-mentioned films are portrayed as "avenging women" (Karki 83) who either kill or attempt to kill

their husbands to avenge the wrong done to them or their families. These women can be seen as an "antithesis to Bollywood's prolific narratives of self-sacrificial women" (Karki 86) who were usually presented as muted victims corresponding to the trivial image of docile, domesticated, obedient, and someone who revered their husbands even if they were abusive (Moini 1453-54).

Agni Sakshi and *Daman* take an identical stance on domestic violence by portraying husbands as cruel, possessive, and exhibiting psychopathic traits. They restrict their wives to their homes and isolate them from the outside world. The films convey that the women's confinement and the hidden nature of the abuse prevent anyone from coming to their aid. The female characters seem powerless in the face of violence, often resorting to tears and pleading to gain respect and empathy from their husbands. Contrary to these representations, *Mehndi* explores the cultural portrayal of non-physical forms of abuse faced by Pooja (Rani Mukherjee), primarily from her mother-in-law for not bringing an adequate dowry[52] from her father. Reflecting the belief that "women are women's worst enemies" (Gangoli 106; Gangoli and Rew 423; Lundberg 13-14), this film portrays Mrs. Chaudhary (Himani Shivpuri) as a villainous character who harasses her daughter-in-law.

The films analyzed in this article interpret their portrayal of domestic abuse as outlined in Section 498A of the Indian Penal Code (IPC, 1860). According to this section, domestic violence is defined as "cruelty" and is categorized into two types. The first category encompasses any deliberate behavior likely to drive a woman to commit suicide or cause severe injury or danger to her life, limb, or health, either physical or mental (Section 498A, clause "a"). The second category involves harassment of a woman with the intent to coerce her or her relatives to meet unlawful demands for property or valuable assets, often related to dowry (Clause "b"). "Cruelty" is considered a serious offense under Section 498A, but its precise definition within matrimonial law remains subject to interpretation. Broadly, physical cruelty may vary depending on the sensitivity and vulnerability of the individual involved, but surely involves physical aggression causing injury or threat to life. On the other hand, non-physical violence encompasses a range of behaviors, including harassment, disrespectful conduct, refusal to engage in marital relations, and withholding of basic necessities such as medical treatment, food, clothing, or shelter by the husband. These non-physical acts are considered part of the broader issue of violence against women (Misra 109-10). Reflecting this conceptual interpretation, domestic abuse is depicted in contemporary Hindi films as mental and emotional abuse in addition to physical violence (Thukral and Jaipuria 1078). Since it is difficult to quantify and record emotional and psychological violence, films play an important role in capturing the full picture of the mental levels of violence that defy quantification (Chatterjee 694).

This article conducts a textual and discourse analysis of select Hindi films: *Agni Sakshi*, *Mehndi,* and *Daman*: *A Victim of Marital Violence* (hereafter *Daman*). The textual and discourse analysis methods are employed to understand how domestic violence formulated in law permeated the cinematic imagination. Focusing on the "law and film" feminist film theory by Kamir ("Framed," 2), the article examines how the legal terminology of "cruelty" defined within Section 498A of the IPC is interpreted in Hindi films. It considers two films, *Agni Sakshi* and *Daman*, to analyze how the concept of "cruelty" is depicted as male violence due to the husbands' psychopathic disorder. Additionally, by analyzing the film *Mehndi,* the article discusses how the "unlawful demand for any property or valuable security" or dowry contributes to domestic violence. These films conceptualize the legalistic matter of domestic violence in two ways: 1) in the form of battering, sexual, emotional, and verbal abuse by a psychopathic husband, and 2) as family violence caused by the social evil of dowry. This article delves into the analysis of contemporary Hindi films in India, focusing on how they portray domestic violence and how such depictions have been

[52] A dowry refers to a transfer of assets, which may include money or property, given by the bride's family to the groom or his family during the marriage.

co-related to the legal discourses that emerged during the 1980s and 1990s. The discourses of film and law during the period are revisited because domestic violence, as a concept, has been deeply influenced by legal interpretations from the past, establishing a strong connection to its representation in cinema (Sharma and Tripathi 128). The discourse of film is important because "We are living at a time when writing is rapidly losing its social and ideological hegemony" (Hibbitts 887), and audio-visual media are becoming more influential in meaning-making. The law is significant because, over the decades, the discourse of law has become a prominent vehicle for advocating justice and women's rights concerning violence, including domestic abuse. Also, the law and legal discourses have played a central role in giving feminist struggles their political and discursive character (Kapur and Cossman 20). Both law and film complement each other as "Law cannot flourish without memory. Legal meanings require a stable medium in order to persist over time" (Sherwin 3), and films play an important role in creating mass memory.

Cruelty as Psychopathic Male Violence in *Agni Sakshi* and *Daman*

The film *Agni Sakshi*, directed by Parto Ghosh, tells the story of Madhu (Manisha Koirala), who endures severe physical and mental abuse from her husband Vishwanath (Nana Patekar), a possessive and cruel man. The film's narrative on domestic violence begins with Vishwanath adorning Madhu with bangles, necklaces, and other jewelry, implying a domineering display of affection. She feels uncomfortable and says, "I am very upset. Today you did not let me leave the room all day" (01:02:50). Vishwanath forcibly makes her wear the jewelry while she verbally resists: "Why are you adorning me so much? All this jewelry feels burdensome" (01:03:02). Vishwanath replies, "It feels good to me" (01:03:07). His unwavering determination and harsh behavior toward his wife depict him as a masculine figure with authoritative control, who appears to be a "loving" husband on the surface. He insists on his wife looking beautiful to him to satisfy his own ego.

Commenting on Hindu husbands' isolating and controlling behavior, Derné proposes that they deliberately exercise control and restrict their wives' freedom to uphold the advantages they enjoy as male family members ("Hindu Men Talk," 204). They perceive the act of confining wives to the household and fulfilling their needs as integral to leading a desirable life. Furthermore, the notion of maintaining the wife's physical attractiveness is also viewed as a means to reinforce the husband's privileged position. In another display of possession and control, the next scene shows Vishwanath taking Madhu to a decorated hall, where he has arranged a birthday surprise for her. However, to her astonishment, the hall is completely empty, with no guests present. It becomes evident that Vishwanath deliberately chose not to invite anyone, further highlighting his controlling and isolating behavior. Madhu surprisingly asks, "Did you not call anyone else? Are any of your friends coming over?" (01:05:08). In response, Vishwanath becomes infuriated and unleashes his rage. He destroys the decorations, throws the cake, and slaps Madhu forcefully. He demands to know, "Am I not enough? Why do you want a crowd? You should not have said this! This is not fair!" (01:06:25). This scene effectively depicts how Vishwanath instills fear in his wife and makes it abundantly clear that he does not want anyone to come near her or be involved in her life.

Following a similar narrative, *Daman*, directed by Kalpana Lajmi, portrays the story of a wife who experiences physical, sexual, and emotional abuse at the hands of her husband, who is possessive, controlling, and cruel. The character Sanjoy Saikia (Sayaji Shinde) is depicted as a psychopathic and aggressive man who is uninterested in marriage and leads a promiscuous lifestyle. However, under pressure from his parents, who threaten to disinherit him if he does not marry their chosen girl, he reluctantly marries Durga (Raveena Tandon). As a result, Sanjoy despises her and subjects her to physical, mental, and sexual violence.

The film begins with a scene showing Durga, bruised, frightened, and seeking refuge in a village in Guwahati after escaping her abusive husband. The narrative then shifts to flashbacks, gradually unveiling the reasons behind Durga's escape. One of the initial revelations is that she was kept isolated within the confines of her home, cut off from the outside world. A servant informs the police during the investigation of her disappearance, stating, "It's hard to believe anyone could touch her. She wasn't even allowed to meet outsiders" (00:09:50).

The film foregrounds the patriarchal ideology that perceives women's role primarily as fulfilling the material, sexual, and labor needs of their husbands and in-laws within the context of the family (Chaudhuri et al. 141-43). In order to control her labor, marriage restricts a woman from attaining her educational pursuits, and when she defies the norm, she is subjected to violence and torture. In a sequence in the film, Durga and her family are gathered at the dining table. Sanjoy expresses his discontent with Durga for meeting her friend without his permission. She mentions that her friend's husband supports gender equality in marriage, and expresses her wish for her daughter to have educational opportunities and the freedom to choose her own partner, in contrast to her own experiences. Sanjoy reacts angrily and proceeds to assault Durga in front of their family members physically.

Both films emphasize the aggressive tendencies of the husbands and their isolating behaviors as psychopathic. For example, *Agni Sakshi* suggests that Vishwanath's cruel behavior stems from his possessiveness, controlling nature, and mental instability. It hints at his troubled childhood, where his parents divorced, leaving him feeling alone and insecure. This sense of insecurity makes him afraid that his wife might also be disloyal to him, and they might end up separated. Hence, Vishwanath becomes suspicious and controlling of Madhu's interactions with the outside world, dictating to her every move and confining her to their home. He even prevents her father from visiting and celebrating his daughter's birthday, as he wants Madhu all to himself.

This kind of screening of domestic violence in Hindi cinema made its way to India during the post-liberalization era (post-1991) through the transnational dissemination of ideologies during the process of globalization (Schaefer and Karan 701). This circulation of ideas occurred through the remakes of Hollywood films in Hindi cinema. The Hindi film *Agni Sakshi* was a remake of the Hollywood classic *Sleeping with the Enemy* (1991). Additionally, there were two other Hindi remakes of the same film: *Yaraana* (1995) and *Daraar* (1996). The plot of the film exposes the reality of "fairytale marriage" (Wheeler 159). However, it focuses on individual pathological cases ignoring the wider socio-cultural aspects.

While tracing the portrayal of domestic abuse in mainstream American media, Kozol observed that the media often attempted to portray the broader social issue of domestic violence as individual stories (648). To achieve this, male abusers were often depicted as psychopaths or monsters (Kozol 648). *Agni Sakshi* and *Daman* also present domestic violence as isolated incidents carried out by individuals with psychopathic tendencies. These portrayals tend to emphasize that such acts are exceptional and perpetrated by individuals who are psychologically abnormal or deranged individuals. Another dimension of this theory is that as medical doctors first studied the issue of domestic violence, they concluded that the problem was a consequence of a psychiatric disorder (Kozol 651; McMillon 4). McMillon highlights in her thesis that in the 1960s, research on family violence generally portrayed it as a rare occurrence that primarily affected individuals who were economically disadvantaged or mentally disturbed (4). During this period, most research on family violence focused on child abuse and was authored by medical and mental health professionals. According to Nichols, there exists a recurring "generational pattern" (12) in cases of family violence, wherein the cycle of abuse persists across multiple generations. The author

argues that individuals who have endured significant physical or psychological abuse during childhood are at a heightened risk of incorporating that trauma into their aggressive and violent behavior.

However, there was a significant lack of scholarly and even popular literature on wife abuse before the 1970s. During the 1970s, feminists drew attention to the fact that violence against women is a significant tool for the patriarchal system to subordinate women (Kozol 651). The issue of domestic violence has been emphatically raised by radical feminists like MacKinnon, who claimed that the subjugation and control of women in domestic spheres is political and based on male supremacy ("Difference and Dominance," 40-41). Her critique of the family, marriage, law, and society systems highlighted the power imbalances that consolidate male dominance and control over women's individual autonomy and agency ("A Sex Equality," 268). Acknowledging the perspective of radical feminists, popular literature and films contain the picture of control and coercion to narrate and depict the instances of violence and abuse in private spaces.

In a sequence, when Vishwanath finds Madhu is not present in the house, he confronts her, demanding to know where she has been. He accuses her of being away from home for over two hours, suggesting that shopping can be completed in just one hour. He forcefully drags her back to the market and purchases all the items she had bought, proving that it could be done within the expected timeframe. Terrified by his intense gaze and red eyes, Madhu confesses that she had encountered Mrs. Sharma on her way home and engaged in conversation, causing her delay. The shot portrays Madhu sobbing uncontrollably and feeling overwhelmed with fear at the extremely controlling behavior of her husband.

The same control and coercion Sanjoy imposes upon his wife Durga. On his wedding night, he expresses his hatred for marriage, blaming Durga for ruining his life. He giggles sinisterly and burns her cheek and neck with a lit matchstick, causing Durga to become fearful and weep. When she resists, Sanjoy starts to leave the room angrily. Feeling guilty and terrified, when Durga follows, he threatens her against following him and violently slaps her. On another occasion, during their first wedding anniversary, Durga sends a servant to call Sanjoy back home. He expresses his annoyance at being interrupted while playing cards. He verbally abuses Durga, forcefully wipes off her lipstick, and asserts, "Why have you adorned yourself so much? You are my wife, not a prostitute!" (*Daman* 00:35:30). He kicks her and warns her emphasizing his point with intimidation, "Remember! When I am busy playing cards, never interrupt me. Understand?" (*Daman* 00:35:38). The shot then focuses on Durga sobbing in fear and nodding in compliance.

The most prominent instance that the radical feminists put forth to emphasize male control and dominance in domestic realms is the issue of sexual coercion (Jackson 197). The narratives of both films, *Agni Sakshi* and *Daman,* present battering and coercive sex as central to their thematic structure. When Vishwanath discovers Madhu practicing classical dance, he becomes agitated. In a fit of anger, he starts battering her with a leather belt while also subjecting her to verbal abuse. The sequence reflects the Indian honor society that views "dancing" as an act of rebellion against traditional expectations and contradictory to the image of a wife as "the epitome of virtue and values" (Tere 2). In an honor culture, a male family member is responsible for preserving the "honor" of his family and community. He is expected to prevent the potential "shame" that may arise from defiance of traditional social norms, even with violence (Rogers 230). Vishwanath berates her, questioning, "What did you find this home? A brothel? What would neighbors think of me? Am I letting whores dance in my home?" (*Agni Sakshi* 01:26:13). Throughout this verbal onslaught, he brutally strikes her legs with the belt. Later that night, a shocked, battered, and traumatized Madhu finds Vishwanath near the bed. She is petrified and begs, "Don't beat me, please. I will never dance again. Don't beat me, please" (*Agni Sakshi* 01:28:30). Ignoring her pain and pleas, Vishwanath proceeds to touch her intimately. Despite her expressing that she is hurt, "Not tonight. My legs are hurting a lot. Please!" (*Agni Sakshi* 01:31:00), Vishwanath persists in coercively

having sex with her, arguing that she is his wife and that he cannot seek "love" elsewhere. These instances vividly illustrate how Vishwanath attempts to control and dominate his wife's body and mind through various forms of mental, physical, and sexual abuse.

In *Daman,* when the police officer Sailen Mahanta (Ranjan Koshal), finds Durga in Guwahati, he recalls the night years ago when he discovered her running on the street, terrified and injured. He is eager to learn what happened to her that night. The film delves into a flashback to provide an answer. In the flashback, Durga is shown weeping and lying on her bed while Sanjoy paints her face with a brush to resemble Goddess Durga. Feeling tortured, Durga implores, "Why do you do this to me? Why do you always want to demean me?... What mistakes have I made? I have always obeyed all your commands" (00:48:58). He angrily asks what she expects from him in response to her resistance. Durga emotionally conveys, "You never gave me the respect I deserve as your wife, not in front of family members nor even the servants. Since our marriage, you haven't even touched me" (00:49:16). She questions what she lacks as a woman that he seeks in other women. This infuriates him, leading him to molest her and pour hot wax from a burning candle on her neck and chest. He then brutally rapes her while Durga screams in pain and terror. Despite her agony, she manages to escape and runs on the street in a state of extreme distress. When the police officer finds her injured and raped and wants to know who has done it to her, Durga informs him that Sanjoy is the one who raped her.

Agni Sakshi and *Daman* share a similar approach to depicting domestic violence. Both films portray husbands who are cruel, excessively possessive, and exhibiting psychopathic traits. The narrative reinforces the honor-based value system, which equates the family's honor with regulating female sexuality and conformity to social and traditional norms (Gill and Brah 73). Vishwanath and Sanjoy restrict their wives to the confines of their homes and attempt to isolate them from the outside world.

Cruelty as a Dowry-related Female and Family Violence in *Mehndi*

The film *Mehndi* (1998), directed by Hamid Ali Khan, tells the story of Pooja, who faces mistreatment and mental harassment from her husband Niranjan (Faraaz Khan) and his family due to inadequate dowry provided by her father. The film reflects the contemporary understanding of domestic violence stemming from dowry-related practices. It opens with the wedding of Niranjan and Pooja, where Niranjan's mother and sister eagerly await the new bride's arrival. Niranjan's mother, Mrs. Chaudhary, asks her husband, Mr. Chaudhary (Pramod Moutho), "How much dowry do we get?" (00:07:40). Mr. Chaudhary appears upset and responds with "alright" (00:07:44). Niranjan's sister Kalpita (Shashi Sharma) questions Mrs. Chaudhary about their father's apparent distress, suggesting that they might have received an inadequate dowry. Initially, Mrs. Chaudhary dismisses the idea, considering Pooja's father's wealth and reputation. However, as Niranjan's parents realize that the dowry they received falls short of their expectations, they become disappointed. They had anticipated a larger sum of money and more gifts, given Deewan's (Pooja's father) affluent status in the village. Nevertheless, the story informs that Deewan is financially burdened and struggles to meet even the basic expenses of the wedding.

The film's plot has been inspired by the growing movement in India against dowry-related violence during and after the 1970s. During this period, people openly talked about violence within families (Jaising 51). Feminists have particularly highlighted the distinctive nature of dowry-related violence, considering it a specific form of domestic abuse prevalent in India, frequently connected to dowry demands (Gangoli 99; Tripathi et al. 12). During the 1980s, the women's movement in India gained momentum and garnered increased support in its efforts to combat the practice of dowry. Consequently, between the years 1982 and 1986, the Lok Sabha (Lower House of the Indian Parliament) debates highlighted the issue of domestic violence, leading to significant legislative action. In 1983, Section 498A IPC was enacted to criminalize domestic violence, and in 1986, amendments were made to the *Dowry*

Prohibition Act to address dowry-related violence (Gangoli 105). The campaign against the practice led to the insertion of Section 304B in the IPC, which defined "dowry deaths" and introduced stringent punishment. These laws were responses to nationwide protests by women's organizations, aiming to provide justice to women.

In one of the opening sequences, when Niranjan desires to purchase a factory and needs an additional 10 lakhs (one million) rupees, his family provokes him to ask his father-in-law for the money. They claim that Pooja's father owes them the amount as the dowry received by Niranjan was much less than he deserved. Mr. Chaudhary suggests to his son, "Understand that the bride's family is like a well, and the wife is like a bucket. Place the bucket into the well and keep drawing the water" (00:22:30). Following his father's suggestion, Niranjan requests the 10 lakh rupees from Pooja's father, who reveals his poor financial condition. In response to this, Niranjan angrily leaves his home and refuses to take Pooja back with him. Mrs. Chaudhary, knowing that Pooja's father fails to meet the demands for dowry, suggests that they should not leave hope so early. She hints at harassing and torturing Pooja to the extent that she will voluntarily seek a divorce so that Niranjan can remarry and receive another dowry.

Pooja represents those young brides who are often considered insignificant within the marital household unless they bring a dowry (Gangoli and Rew 422). The verbal abuse and mental torture meted out to Pooja at the failure of fulfilling repeated demands for dowry reflect the widely discussed issue of harassment, torture, and even murder of brides, with the intention of the groom's family arranging a second marriage for financial benefits (Shaha and Mohanty 106). The feminist perspective depicts dowry as an assurance required to acquire security from abuse in a marriage. It is a severe example of women being treated as commodities and denied their rights to equality, autonomy, and agency (Bradley and Pallikadavath 445).

However, the legislative discussions in India often centered on preserving "Indian" culture and perpetuated the belief that "women are women's worst enemies" (Gangoli 106; Gangoli and Rew 423; Lundberg 13-14), which trivialized violence against women. In particular, the debates surrounding the amendments to the *Dowry Prohibition Act* in 1986 included discussions that perpetuated stereotypes of the "villainous" mother-in-law who subjects her daughter-in-law to torture and even death (Gangoli and Rew 424; Lundberg 13-14). The discourse also overlooked violence against single women, as it predominantly focused on violence related to dowry (Gangoli 114). Owing to this belief, the film constructs Mrs. Chaudhary as a villainous character who harasses her daughter-in-law by various means. As Payton suggests, "patriarchal structures unite men against women and the older generation against the younger. Older women may be included in family councils and participate in conspiracies, provided they have internalized the gender roles of the 'honor' system and play a masculine role in enforcing them on the younger generation" (75; see also Bates 295). In one of the sequences, Mrs. Chaudhary instructs Pooja to prepare a meal for everyone, but Mrs. Chaudhary deliberately and secretly adds a large amount of salt to the food so that she can belittle and insult Pooja. When the family members, including Niranjan, taste the food and become angry, Mrs. Chaudhary accuses Pooja, saying, "If it were up to you, you would only poison us" (00:38:13). She again humiliates Pooja in front of Mr. Chaudhary by saying, "It's your own fault that you brought a girl without a mother as our son's bride. If she had a mother, she would have taught her proper etiquette regarding eating and drinking. This entire situation results from your choices, and now you must face the repercussions" (00:38:42). Pooja remains silent, feeling deeply humiliated and burdened by guilt.

With the excuse of Pooja being an incapable cook, Mrs. Chaudhary starts isolating her from the family. She suggests that Pooja should no longer cook because she is incapable, but she must wash a large number of dishes and threatens her that she must not break anything. Pooja is burdened with an excessive number of dishes to wash. When criticized for giving Pooja extra work, Mrs. Chaudhary

arrogantly justifies it by stating, "I was about to provide more utensils for washing. So that they could be scrubbed all night long" (00:40:30). In addition to these, to torture her further, they plan to feed Pooja cat leftovers for dinner, and Mr. Chaudhary suggests, "If you feed cat leftovers to her, she will become as unfaithful as a cat and will leave this house soon" (00:41:21).

As Pooja becomes increasingly aware of the conspiracy against her, she confronts her mother-in-law, Mrs. Chaudhary, stating, "I am aware that the more I tolerate, the more you will continue to be cruel. Nevertheless, I will endure all your cruelties. If you think that I will leave this house because of your oppression, then you are mistaken" (00:42:27). When Pooja's in-laws fail to drive her away through non-physical harassment, they resort to a plan to tarnish her reputation in the eyes of her husband, Niranjan. Her mother-in-law falsely accuses Pooja of spending a night with an unknown man, portraying her as impure. In response, Niranjan becomes angry and violently slaps Pooja. Subsequently, she is subjected to further physical abuse and forcefully expelled from the house by her husband and his family members.

The film critiques the practice of dowry, which is still prevalent despite being legally prohibited and publicly criticized. It is considered culturally acceptable and socially sanctioned. Many young men and their families view dowry as a legitimate way to acquire luxury items, pay off debts, and improve their social status (Prasad 73). Agnes refers to data from the National Crime Records Bureau which highlights that since 2008, over eight thousand women have been killed by their husbands each year due to dowry disputes. This alarming statistic highlights the severe consequences of dowry-related issues, including the physical, mental, verbal, and sexual abuse endured by thousands of Indian women (Agnes 13). Families that fail to meet the expected dowry norms or deviate from them may face the anger and frustration of the groom's family. This can lead to mistreatment and abuse of the bride at her marital home. The institution of dowry, therefore, contributes to significant violence against women, including abuse within families, demands for additional payments, and in extreme cases, murder or suicide (Prasad 73).

The film depicts the problem of domestic violence not as men versus women. It paints it as a dowry-related family dispute where the chief perpetrator of the bride's harassment remains the mother-in-law. *Mehndi* mirrors a real situation about women being perpetrators of violence against women within the domestic setting. It hints at the conditions of the reproduction of patriarchy where women may willingly endorse patriarchal structures because they anticipate gaining long-term advantages. As a result, some women endure unfavorable treatment from their in-laws during their initial marriage phase, with the expectation that once they assume the position of a mother-in-law, they will exert authority over their sons' wives (Chaudhuri et. al 143). This belief is also reflected in judicial and legal measures to stop dowry-related domestic violence. As a result, despite women making up a small percentage of the prison population in India, mothers-in-law are frequently arrested and convicted in cases of dowry-related deaths (Gangoli and Rew 421). Studies in India have shown that a significant portion of domestic violence cases involves female relatives of the husband as perpetrators or instigators of violence. Nonetheless, there are multiple feminist perspectives on domestic violence in India, with some viewing it as male violence against women, others considering the role of mothers-in-law within the wider marital household, and some seeing mother-in-law violence as a form of proxy violence against women (Gangoli and Rew 421).

Domestic Violence as a Private and Family Matter

All three films discussed above present domestic abuse in two main ways: either as an issue linked to a psychopathic husband or as a sociological problem associated with the malpractice of dowry. According to Haaken, labeling the abuser as a psychopath is problematic because it "puts women at greater risk and redeems men by focusing on childhood trauma rather than on male power and control"

(77). Similarly, the discussion surrounding dowry as a key factor in violence against women within households fails to acknowledge the unequal power dynamics between men and women that exist within these domestic settings and contribute to such violence. Madhu Kishwar endorses the criticism as she contends, "I have come to the firm conclusion that the terms 'dowry death' and 'dowry violence' are misleading. They contribute towards making domestic violence in India appear as a unique, exotic phenomenon" (2). Both interpretations view domestic violence as a private matter, which contradicts the perspective advocated by feminists. According to the feminist worldview, domestic violence is not solely a medical problem or an issue of dowry, but rather a significant and pervasive consequence of the hierarchical system of honor that perpetuates violence against women within the confines of the home. One of the major concerns that feminists raise is that patriarchal notions of honor consider domestic violence as a private matter that should not be openly discussed or brought into the public sphere.

In the film *Agni Sakshi*, Madhu manages to escape from Vishwanath by faking her death and assuming the identity of Subhangi in Bombay, India. She tries to hide her identity to start her life afresh. However, when Vishwanath discovers that his wife is now married to Suraj (Jackie Shroff), he insists on proving in court that Subhangi is actually Madhu and his wife. Suraj's parents' and Madhu (Subhangi)'s responses to the idea of contesting the case in court reflect honor-based common social beliefs prevalent in India. Suraj's mother says, "The very name of court instills fear in me" (01:57:50). His father says, "It will only bring us further discredit. It will provide another opportunity for the media to sensationalize and tarnish our reputation. And then our dignity..." (01:58:04). Vishwanath threatens Madhu (Subhangi) by emphasizing that going to court would bring dishonor to both of them and make it difficult for Suraj to face anyone. Madhu (Subhangi) could seek justice in court for the mental and physical torture she endured from Vishwanath. However, to safeguard Suraj's and his family's honor, she chooses not to involve the court and instead returns to Vishwanath as his wife.

Kamir analyses the inequality, indignity, oppression, and abuse of women in the home as a trait of honor-based patriarchal culture. An honor-based value system, often associated with rigid conduct codes and hierarchical social roles, revolves around honor and shame. In such societies, individuals are evaluated and ranked based on their adherence to these codes, emphasizing traits like pride, assertiveness, independence for men, and sexual purity for women ("Framed," 5-8). Conformity to the honor code is glorified, while deviant behavior is deemed shameful. Honor is a disciplinary tool and a source of social power, with specific behavior codes enforced for individuals to achieve and maintain honor. Such cultures are collectivist, where an individual's honor impacts their reputation and that of their clan or larger group. Social class plays a significant role, with gender being a prominent factor. In most honor cultures, honor is predominantly associated with masculinity, and men are considered the primary bearers of it. Women's honor is often secondary and tied to their ability to protect and maintain the honor of the men in their lives ("Honor and Dignity," 196-198).

Similarly, in the film *Mehndi*, Pooja's father asks the court judge to stop divorce proceedings as it will tarnish the honor of his daughter and his family. Instead, he will persuade Pooja to sign the divorce papers without any legal contest and accept all the pain and suffering helplessly as their fate. He pleads with the court arguing, "Milord, they not only want to divorce Pooja but also want to humiliate her in a court of law and deprive her of the right to live (by disgracing her honor). I will never allow them to do so" (01:15:42). However, a violent incident occurs within the court as Deewan is killed by Niranjan's brother-in-law (Mahavir Shah). These events serve as a turning point for Pooja, leading her to break free from the confines of societal customs and traditions. Motivated by the suffering she has endured, Pooja decides to take revenge. She strongly opposes Niranjan's second marriage and takes matters into her own hands. Seeking justice for her father's murder, first, she kills Niranjan's brother-in-law. Pooja then publicly humiliates Niranjan's parents by smearing black paint on their faces and parading them on a donkey

through the village, thereby exposing their wrongdoings to the community. Finally, in a climactic moment, Pooja shoots Niranjan, ultimately ending his reign of injustice and cruelty.

Daman also projects marital abuse as a private matter. When the police arrive at Sanjoy Saikia's home to investigate Durga's rape by her husband, his mother pleads with the officer to bury the case immediately. She fears that "If this news spreads, it will become the subject of a gossip throughout the entire city. We will no longer be able to face anyone with dignity" (00:52:01). Even Durga refuses to disclose anything to the police officer. The police decide to withdraw since Durga and her in-laws do not want them involved. Later, Police Officer Sailen Mahanta attempts to convince Durga to file a case against Sanjoy as the only way to escape his abuse. He informs her that "there is another way. You can send him a divorce notice citing both mental and physical abuse…" (01:30:24). However, Durga once again refuses, saying, "So that the whole society becomes aware (of the disgraceful incidents)?" (01:30:24). Towards the end of the film, as a last resort to end the ongoing abuse, Durga takes matters into her own hands and kills Sanjoy.

In the films discussed, the female characters who experience abuse and violence refrain from reporting the crimes to the police or any legal authority. They do not even seek divorce from their husbands, reflecting the contention that women's interest lies in preserving their marriage as it grants them status, social and economic security, and privileges through their children (Ahmed-Ghosh 114). In addition, this aspect reflects the underlying patriarchal values that perceive domestic violence as a personal and private matter. Making it public by any means brings shame and disgrace to the family. Moreover, the significance placed on family honor forms a fundamental aspect of the Indian social framework, as the family continues to wield considerable influence within the social structure (Jyothi Vishwanath and Palakonda 386-387; Chakravarti 310). Mandal quotes Sumitra Mahajan (former Speaker of the Lower House of Indian Parliament) as saying during a parliamentary debate that Indian society has a unique family system and family affairs (263). The spousal disputes should be resolved within the family instead of being politicized and publicized in courts. Therefore, these women never actively engage with legal institutions fearing social outrage. Instead, they either opt to escape the abusive environment by leaving their marital homes or seek vigilante justice.

Conclusions

The portrayal of domestic violence in films like *Agni Sakshi*, *Daman*, and *Mehndi* reflects a broader trend observed in popular Hindi films and contemporary domestic violence laws. These films often present domestic violence as individual stories rather than acknowledging it as a systemic social issue. Male abusers are depicted as psychopaths or monsters, distancing them from the patriarchal system and normalizing the behavior of those men who are abusive but not psychopaths. Similarly, dowry-related disputes emphasize ending the culture of dowry, trivializing other aspects of domestic violence. By focusing on the exceptional and deviant nature of the perpetrators, the films create a disassociation between domestic violence and the patriarchal oppression of women in conjugal space. While these films touch upon the issue of domestic violence, they fail to provide any solution in law or in society. This portrayal underscores the helplessness and powerlessness of the female characters, perpetuating the notion that they are completely at the mercy of their abusive partners or their families. The absence of outside intervention or support further reinforces the idea that domestic violence is a private matter hidden behind closed doors.

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Authors:

Navin SHARMA is a UGC-NET Senior Research Fellow (PhD) and Teaching Assistant of English in the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology, Patna (India). For his PhD dissertation, he is working on the intersections between law and Indian films in Hindi. His areas of research interest comprise Feminist Studies, Human Rights Studies, and Legal Humanities. He has recently published his articles in the journals *AlterNative: An International Journal of Indigenous Peoples* (SAGE Journals), *National Identities, Media Asia* (Taylor & Francis) and *Gender Studies* (Sciendo).
ORCID ID https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5938-0333
Contact: navins051@gmail.com

Priyanka TRIPATHI is an Associate Professor of English and former Head of the Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Indian Institute of Technology, Patna (India). She is the co-executive editor of *Journal of International Women's Studies*. She has been awarded Visiting Research Fellowship (2022-23), by IASH, University of Edinburgh for her project titled, "Optimizing Caste Intersectionality: A Decolonial Reading of Gender-based Violence in Select Subaltern Fiction in India." She has published extensively with *Indian Literature, Journal of Graphic Novels and Comics, GeoHumanities, Economic and Political Weekly* amongst others. She has received several grants: JIWS fellowship 2021-22 (Bridgewater State University), Shastri Conference and Lecture Series Grant (SCLSG) 2021-22, Post-colonial Association grant 2020-21, CIIL conference grant 2020 amongst others. She has also worked on several government sponsored projects related to gender issues. She works in the area of Gender Studies, South Asian Fiction, GeoHumanities and Graphic Novels.
ORCID ID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-9522-3391
Contact: priyankatripathi@iitp.ac.in

Jaime Segura San Miguel
Universidad Complutense de Madrid

Mad Narcissists—The Myth of Narcissus in *American Psycho* and Mythological Revisionism in the Manosphere

Abstract: Identity, often conceptualized as a continuum of the ego, lies at the conflux of both individual and collective interpretations of reality. The constructions of reality and identity are, however, far from being a purely cognitive trait; both are constructed through interaction with others, to the point where faulty interactions can lead to a lack of individuation, and the echo chambers of the Manosphere can skew a subject's interpretation of reality. The postmodern turn of cinema after the 1980s, acknowledging this relativism, presented deeply pathological characters in a more nuanced way, giving way to ambiguity. Bret Easton Ellis's *American Psycho*'s Patrick Bateman is a pathological character who is described as having pathological traits but who has nonetheless been adopted by the Manosphere as an idealized role model. This article aims to comment on the mythical subversion of the myth of Narcissus in the narrative, the identity problem that Patrick Bateman suffers from, and to disentangle the processes whereby the Manosphere is misappropriating classical myths, mythologizing narrative characters to phenomenologically construct a different perception of reality, and how these problems are linked with an unrealized identity.

Keywords: Myth of Narcissus, American Psycho, madness, Manosphere, identity

> Both the author of these *Notes* and the *Notes* themselves are, of course, fictional. Nevertheless, such persons as the composer of these *Notes* not only exist in our society, but indeed must exist, considering the circumstances under which our society has generally been formed. I have wished to bring before the public, somewhat more distinctly than usual, one of the characters of our recent past. He represents a generation that is still living out its days among us. (Dostoievski 6).

Introduction

"You missed the point by idolizing them" Starter Pack. The title corresponds to an image in meme format, and serves as its heading, with the photos of a few characters right below: *Joker*'s Arthur Fleck (2019), *American Psycho*'s Patrick Bateman (2000), *Fight Club*'s Tyler Durden (1999), *Watchmen*'s Rorschach (2009), *Taxi Driver*'s Travis Bickle (1976), and others. This meme format, which became viral in 2020, denounces the skewed view of certain people who have developed an appreciation for some of the previous characters—along with others who were originally created as antiheros or downright extremely negative characters—and stands in stark contrast to the "Literally Me" Syndrome, exemplified by memes that show admiration for such characters since 2018. Although online platforms have provided some criticism and attention to the latter, academic study continues to largely disregard it, despite its cultural significance and impact on the way mental health should be conceptualized and addressed as a social and psychological concern (Chowdhury n.p.).

It would be an understatement to say that these depictions of psychopathologies are problematic. Although initially intended for comedic purposes and employed ironically, these characters and their

perceived identity have had a devastating impact: bolstered by the discourse generated by hate groups in the Manosphere—an umbrella term that encompasses Incels, man's rights activists, pick-up artists and other misogynist groups—[53] as of 2019, speculation has already surfaced that at least 24 mass shooters in the United States, accounting for over one-third of all public and terrorist attacks in the past decade, had connections to either Incel (involuntary celibates) culture or Manosphere communities, which propagate a misogynistic ideology. These attacks resulted in the deaths of 1128 individuals between 1982 and 2019, and a disturbing rising trend has been observed since 2016 (Statista Research Department). It goes without saying that this phenomenon has not emerged in a vacuum, and while men's mental health, masculinity, and the portrayal of these concepts in literature and film remain the main issue, the emergence of radical and even terrorist perspectives associated with it has been influenced by several factors. The media have extensively covered a "loneliness epidemic" that appears to disproportionately affect men during the past few years. Nonetheless, the majority of the data comes from annual Cigna Group reports from 2018, which demonstrate unequivocally that men (57%) and women (59%) are equally affected. Likewise, data demonstrates that those from lower income brackets and racial minorities are impacted by a greater margin. However, the media have presented the issue as an epidemic that mostly affects white heterosexual men in the United States. While it is accurate to say that the absence of a support system frequently exacerbates the issue for males, this fails to paint an adequate picture. The reaction to that loneliness and its source are both attributable to toxic masculinity, a topic that sociologists and psychologists equally investigate. As a result of perceived and expected gender norms, males are less likely to establish meaningful relationships, discuss their emotions, or seek therapy, according to studies (Kupers; Parent *et al.*; Pearson).

More than two decades since Marysia Zalewski and Jane Parpart first posed "the man question,"[54] the exploration of man's subjecthood, hegemony, and the development of a new, constructive masculinity reflective of the advancements of third-wave feminism appears to have stagnated. The transformative shifts in gender roles that commenced in the 1950s, a failure lamented by Connell as it involved the subjectification of women through alternative means (23), have, in certain societal sectors, even experienced regression. While toxic masculinity may be less pervasive in contemporary society, particularly as a pushback to feminist movements, it has undergone radicalization within specific communities. The upsurge in post-pandemic loneliness, the enhanced agency of women who increasingly eschew relationships with individuals embodying toxic masculinity, and the legitimization of populist discourse amid the authoritarian turn since 2010 collectively provide a fertile environment for this phenomenon. Specifically, discourse analyst Ruth Wodak has delineated far-right populist rhetorical strategies that bear an eerie resemblance to manipulation tactics employed by narcissists. These strategies encompass victim-perpetrator reversal, coercive control, smearing campaigns, and projection (26). Despite being demographically situated within the most affluent and powerful bracket—white, Anglo-American, and heterosexual—men within the Manosphere articulate a sense of disenfranchisement, perceived attack, and alienation by society (Zuckerberg 2). And these fictional pathological characters, as

[53] Specifically, the Manosphere has been defined by Steve McCullough, from the Canadian Museum for Human rights as "wide variety of men's groups operating on the internet and offline. Many describe themselves as fighting against progressive (or 'woke') ideas about gender equality. Manosphere influencers often assert the unfounded idea that men are naturally dominant" (n.p.). Donna Zuckerberg (1) explains that they often coordinate attacks to send death and rape threats to outspoken feminists. Additionally, they have been found to be partly responsible for fostering the extremist discourse in groups that are grooming youth online for extremist behaviour and terrorist attacks (Alava *et al.*).

[54] See *The "Man" Question in International Relations*, Routledge, 1998.

previously mentioned, serve as a conduit for the idealization of narcissistic masculinism within these communities, constructing an alternative reality that aligns with their perceptions.

Patrick Bateman, a Post-Modern Narcissus?

American Psycho, authored by Bret Easton Ellis in 1991, introduces us to Patrick Bateman, a 27-year-old Wall Street investment banker. Initially portrayed as an exceedingly self-centered individual with an obsession with his image and societal standing, the narrative progressively unveils darker facets of Bateman's character. It becomes evident that he is utterly incapable of loving anyone beyond himself, he reacts aggressively to those displaying superficial interest in him and, despite an intense desire for it, appears to be bound by fate never to experience genuine affection. These motifs serve as a foundation for exploring the reception of the Narcissus myth, establishing narratological parallels between the motifs found in *American Psycho* and the mythemes of Narcissus. This concept of mytheme, considered to be essential from a myth-critical point of view for narratological and structural analysis of narratives, was initially described by Lévi-Strauss (430-432), but this analysis draws on the definition from Cultural Myth Criticism: a mytheme is a minimal, thematic and mythological unit whose indispensable transcendent or supernatural nature allows the interaction with other mythemes to create myths (Losada 542). Due to their importance for myth-critical analysis, this first section goes into the narratological and mythematic similarities between both texts.

The first, most salient and conspicuous parallelism lies in how modern psychiatry has aptly identified Bateman's pathological personality as reflective of Narcissus, making him undeniably narcissistic—a point best addressed in due course. A second parallelism, concerning mythemes, can be drawn from Echo's silence. In Ovid's *Metamorphoses*, Echo undergoes a punishment where she loses her voice, condemned only to repeat the last words of others due for having distracted Juno while Jove was unfaithful to her (83). Consequently, Echo's interaction with Narcissus is characterized by her frustrating repetition of his last words; when Narcissus, separated from his hunting group, calls out, “Is there anybody here?” Echo can only respond with an emphatic “Here!” The ensuing dialogue involves Narcissus urging her to approach him, to cease avoiding him, and meet, leading to the tragic denouement: Echo's curse renders communication utterly impossible between her and the object of her affection, resulting in Narcissus rejecting her outright (84). In Ellis's novel, this mytheme assumes a postmodern dimension. If Echo's silence is a consequence of the jealousy and spite of the goddess Juno, Bateman's incapacity to communicate with others stems from the pronounced self-centeredness and egotism pervasive among the characters in the narrative. They incessantly drone on without listening, akin to the repetitive nature of Echo.

> “I’m leaving,” Price shouts. “I’m getting out.”
> “Leaving what?” I shout back, confused.
> “This,” he shouts, referring to, I’m not sure but I think, his double Stoli.
> “Don’t,” I tell him. “I’ll drink it.”
> “Listen to me Patrick,” he screams. “I’m *leaving*.”
> I start laughing, not knowing what he means. “Well, *where* are you going to go?”
> “*Away!*” he shouts.
> “Don’t tell me,” I shout back at him. “Merchant banking?”
> “*No*, Bateman. I’m serious you dumb son-of-a-bitch. *Leaving*. (Ellis 60)

Similarly, in "Office," Bateman instructs Jean to cancel an appointment four times, receiving the exact same response each time: “‘Just… say… no?’ she repeats” (64). The third mytheme pertains to Bateman's rejection of the only two individuals who offer him genuine love, namely Luis Carruthers and Jean.

Analogously, Narcissus' ultimate unhappiness stems from such rejections. Ovid recounts how, after spurning Echo, “one of those he had scorned raised up his hands to Heaven and prayed: May he himself fall in love with another, as we have done with him! May he too be unable to gain his loved one!” (85). This prayer by Narcissus' scorned lovers precipitates his concrete plight. If Tiresias had earlier prophesied that Narcissus could live to a “ripe old age” only “if he does not come to know himself” (83), now Nemesis, paying heed to Narcissus' rejected admirers’ pleas, determines that he will never be loved by the one he loves—an understanding Narcissus reaches after seeing his reflection. In a soliloquy, he reflects on the cause of his sorrow: “I am in love, and see my loved one, but that form which I see and love, I cannot reach: so far am I deluded by my love,” and acknowledges, “grief is sapping my strength; little of life remains for me—I am cut off in the flower of my youth. I have no quarrel with death, for in death I shall forget my pain” (86). Paralleling this, Bateman's sorrow emanates from his rejection of love. Setting aside his murderous tendencies, Bateman manifests a pathological need for love and admiration, evident in various instances throughout the novel. These instances include comparisons of his business cards to those of his associates (Ellis 44), when he asks “How’s my hair” (232; 332), when he says he just wants to fit in (237) or when he admits that he enjoys having girls “debase themselves in front of me” for his attention (301). However, even amid admiration, he struggles to find or accept love. As Bateman bitterly concedes, "I’m weeping for myself […] I just want to be loved" (345). This incapacity to find or accept love parallels Narcissus' plight, accentuating Bateman's grief. Aware of others' indifference toward him, Bateman asserts that nobody would notice if he were to disappear, and they might even "feel an odd, indefinable sense of relief" (226). In a subsequent soliloquy, he articulates his pain akin to Narcissus: “My conscience, my pity, my hopes disappeared a long time ago […] My pain is constant and sharp and I do not hope for a better world for anyone. In fact, I want my pain to be inflicted on others. I want no one to escape” (377).

While there are additional noteworthy similarities between Narcissus and Bateman, such as their ability to attract attention and their noble lineage, these aspects do not constitute mythemes and are thus less pertinent for Cultural Myth Critical analysis. However, both characters draw attention wherever they go, and they are heirs to noble and powerful families—the river god Cephissus and the nymph Liriope in Narcissus' case, or the closest simile in 1980s late-stage-capitalist New York, a wealthy family of bankers in Bateman’s. Furthermore, both characters share an inherent inability to relate to others. In Narcissus' case, this incapacity is described as a refusal to allow others to love him out of pride: “Many lads and many girls fell in love with him, but his soft young body housed a pride so unyielding that none of those boys or girls dared to touch him” (Ovid 83). This prideful rejection extends not only to people in general but, crucially for mythological analysis, to both Echo, the young nymph—in Ovid’s version—, and a young man, Ameinias—in Pausanias’ version. Similarly, Bateman proves incapable of genuinely reciprocating the affection of those who claim to love him. He engages in superficial and disconnected relationships, often marked by mindless sexual encounters with individuals like his girlfriend Evelyn or Courtney, or strangers, usually even unnamed girls whom he kills thereafter. As he expresses to Evelyn, “I'm sorry. You're just... Not terribly important... to me” (Ellis 340), underscoring his profound disassociation and inability to love—and empathize with—nearly everyone around him.

Indeed, we encounter various mythemes in *American Psycho,* which have been adopted—and adapted—from classical mythology. For example, the theme of Echo's loss of her voice, triggered by the spiteful Juno, or Narcissus' incapacity to find true love, caused by Nemesis after hearing the prayers of those he had scorned, as depicted in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* or Pausanias' *Description of Greece*. These mythemes have been distinguished from mere themes as they possess both thematic and mythological qualities, with a transcendent nature. Narcissus' obsession with himself, which ultimately seals his fate, is another mytheme inasmuch as it has also been precipitated by Nemesis (Ovid 85), and prophesied by

Tiresias. Indeed, not only does Nemesis' curse mean that he could never find love but also that he would meet the fate that marks him as a tragic character: living to a ripe old age was possible for Narcissus, but only "if he does not come to know himself" (Ovid 83), thus fating him to an early death. This mytheme proves to be particularly intriguing and pivotal for this analysis, as it parallels Bateman's inability to take control of his own life. In a distinctly postmodern iteration (Elkind 157-159), Bateman's predicament is justified more by psychological factors than transcendent or supernatural forces. His enduring unhappiness is rooted in his lack of individuation and his pathological condition, rather than in a prophecy or the actions of a revengeful goddess. His inability to empathize with others is, in a sense, his inherited tragic fate. Analogous to tragic characters unable to escape their nemesis due to hubris or transgressions, Bateman cannot break free from his narcissism and psychopathy, condemning him to a life of perpetual pain. Moreover, his illness appears to accelerate as the narrative progresses. Initially, his pathological traits align solely with those of Narcissistic Personality Disorder, such as a grandiose sense of self-importance or an excessive need for admiration (APA 761), manifested in his consistent self-obsession with reflections in various surfaces at the story's outset.

> "Hi. Pat Bateman," I say, offering my hand, noticing my reflection in a mirror hung on the wall - and smiling at how good I look […] I catch a glimpse of my reflection on the surface of the table. My skin seems darker because of the candlelight and I notice how good the haircut I got at Gio's last Wednesday looks (Ellis 11-12).

Or,

> I pull my Armani shirt up and place her hand on my torso, wanting her to feel how rock-hard, how *halved* my stomach is, and I flex the muscles, grateful it's light in the room so she can see how bronzed and defined my abdomen has become (23).

Nevertheless, as the narrative unfolds, Bateman's fate inexorably draws ever nigher: he starts having hallucinations (86; 182), displaying erratic behavior (151; 281), and suffering profound sorrow (343; 347; 377), not to mention his countless acts of wrathful violence, serving as inspiration for the book's title. Bateman is biologically, deterministically, and essentially drawn into this path by his nature, just like Narcissus cannot avoid his fate, a trajectory which parallels the mythological character's inability to avoid his own fate. However, even with these adapted mythemes, the question arises: can Patrick Bateman truly be considered a mythological character? The inclination to misclassify diverse narratives as myths, depending on the chosen definition, is not a novel phenomenon (Lévi-Strauss 428; Durand 11; Losada 18). However, it is our humanistic responsibility to approach analysis with the most appropriate methodology and sincere heuristics.

Bateman cannot be accurately characterized as a mythicized character, despite how frequently media have described him as such, particularly following his adoption by the Manosphere (Arizuno). Rather, Bateman might be better understood as participating in a process of mythification or, rather, he is pseudo-mythicized. Like many historical characters, he has absolutely transcended his narrative and become a cultural icon, but he still has a historical reference, instead of having become atemporal or asynchronous, which is a *conditio sine qua non* in a mythification process (Losada 489). Bateman, in essence, assumes an exemplary role. Much like certain artists meticulously craft a personal brand, Patrick Bateman has become ingrained in the collective imagination through the adoption of his most distinctive features: the power suit, slicked-back hairstyle, raincoat, and Walkman. It can be said that he functions as a symbolic figure representing an idealized, albeit toxic, masculinity (Grass, Ustaer), feeding into the construction of a new masculinity as a concept that is raised to the category of dogma for young men to accept and follow blindly. In spite of all the aspects that might lead some cultural critics and journalists to categorize Patrick Bateman

as a myth, a formalist and scientific examination yields a different conclusion. While one might argue that *American Psycho* draws inspiration from or adopts some of the themes that the Thespian hunter's fate seems to warn us about—the dangers of obsessing over materialistic qualities or beauty springs to mind powerfully—the narrative itself is not mythological. Bateman possesses qualities that enable him to transcend his narrative, serving as a mediator for readers' desires. His behavioral traits and material characteristics allow worshippers to emulate the gestures, style and speech of their idols, so that they can transiently feel homologous to them and satisfy their transcendental desire (Losada 491). This psychological sublimation arises from the attribution of mythical properties or qualities to characters like Bateman. Such attributes seldom originate from the character's intrinsic exceptional qualities but are instead a consequence of the exceptional dimension conferred upon them by their worshippers (Losada 492-3).

Similarly, while some mythemes may be observed in both narratives, they lose their transcendent reference, indicative of a demythification process. In the case of *American Psycho*, spiritual dimensions give way to corporeal ones (Losada 417). Whereas problems in the myth of Narcissus occur due the gods' interventions, the problems in Bateman's narrative are not the result of divine interventions but rather the outcome of simple—allow me the license, if we can define mental health problems as such—psychopathologies, aligning more with mental health issues. This shift equally mocks traditional plot-driving elements; where Echo's inability to speak was a consequence of transgressing against the gods, *American Psycho* offers a postmodern critique of communication in an increasingly individualistic society. Bateman struggles to communicate with women—or other narcissistic men—not due to divine intervention, but because nobody pays attention to anybody, and people mindlessly parrot and drone without concern for being heard. Furthermore, not only does death in the narrative stop being a frontier between two worlds, the immanent and the transcendent; it is even more disheartening. Bateman is convinced that if he were to die, nobody would care, or perhaps, even notice (Ellis 226).

In a way, *American Psycho* might offer readers an ecstatic experience similar to what individuals in ancient, more spiritual cultures might have felt when confronted with the epiphany of supernatural transcendence in the natural world. In our postmodern society, these experiences are driven by ideas of power, success, and beauty—modern interpretations of ancient sublime notions that can act as emotional catalysts (Losada 533), and which can, in a way, serve as cheap substitutes for transcendence, reflecting the shifting interests of our current society, more focused on materialism and consumerism. Although *American Psycho* cannot qualify as a myth, it still holds a thematic and symbolic function in our modern world. If classical societies explained fate through various mythemes—and the specific combinations thereof to create a myth—, as seen in works like Sophocles' *Oedipus Rex*, Euripides' *Medea,* or Aeschylus' *Prometheus Bound*, *American Psycho* could aspire to follow in the footsteps of such elevated authors and speak about the preordained tragic nature of humankind in postmodernity. Just as many myths traditionally dealt with representations of cultural values, transgression, and their nemesis—the myth of Narcissus being a prime example thereof—*American Psycho* can be read in a similar light, and such a reading can help explain why the Manosphere has so readily adopted Patrick Bateman as an idol.

The Manosphere and Misappropriation of Myths

The nature of truth, and the extent to which knowledge thereof can be gained, has long been a contentious issue for philosophy. Especially, the debate on whether truth is objective and exists outside of the human mind or, on the contrary, truth is constructed through human interaction to arrive at subjective interpretations of the world, is key to this argument. Since this paper aims at shedding light on the construction of alternative, post-truth (Arendt 4; Kalpokas) realities by communities of the Manosphere, it is important to introduce some of the terminology used to speak about representations of reality. Paul

Godet posited that allegories originated from abstract ideas that gave rise to representations, while symbols were initially representations and sources of ideas, among other things (qtd. in Delanglade et al. 125). However, in a postmodern society, these representations can hardly be taken at face value to signify transcendent ideas in the same way they did centuries ago. As previously mentioned, symbols in contemporary culture often represent ideas of power, success, and beauty—precisely the symbols upheld by the Manosphere and the values they promote. Jean Lacroix noted the paradox that positivism, while removing God from the equation, simultaneously sacralized new ways of thinking (110).

In essence, the rise and dominance of positivism and scientism had cleared the path for iconoclasm, but these postmodern iconoclasts subsequently sought their own idols and elevated them to a dimension where they could be worshipped, and their values treated as dogma. Dogma, derived from the Greek δόγμα (opinion, belief, or judgment) and, in turn, from the verb δοκεῖ (to seem), is closely related to *doxa* (δόξα), which more accurately describes the issue at hand. In classical rhetoric, *doxa* is understood to be opposite to *episteme* (ἐπιστήμη), knowledge or understanding. Here, dogma is used to refer to the subjective truth or belief that the Manosphere constructs by adopting and adapting myths. For Foucault, the episteme was a strategic apparatus enabling the selection of statements acceptable within a scientific field, thereby determining what could be described as true or false (197). It is crucial to note that when Foucault speaks about truth, he does not refer to the property of being in accord with fact or reality. Instead, he adopts a substantive constructivist approach, suggesting that truth can be socially constructed—echoing Giambattista Vico's epistemological axiom *verum ipsum factum*—through social interaction. This truth is a category "produced only by virtue of multiple forms of constraint [and] it induces regular effects of power" (Foucault 131).

This perspective finds support in Surette's contention that not only are reality and truth constructed through and shaped by social interaction, contrary to the propositions of positivism and empiricism, but also that the growing reliance on social media, coupled with cognitive bias among viewers, significantly contributes to the shaping of reality (6). Furthermore, mass media often conform to the *status quo* to avoid overly challenging or discomforting the general populace, aiming to maintain credibility and ensure profitability for investors (8). Given that the reality portrayed in social media is generally accepted by most individuals without undergoing critical analysis of the underlying discourses that govern it, the influence of conservative social values on reality, particularly in post-war America, becomes apparent (12-13). Paradoxically, even though this has facilitated the idolization of Patrick Bateman, this traditional influence has generally led to a biased and negative perception of mental health issues among the general population, who often rely on the media "as their only means of interpretation on crime issues," (McCready 3) which are frequently associated with psychopathologies in film and literature more often than medical statistics suggest. Moreover, social media platforms often cherry-pick sensationalized accounts of crimes, presented through formats like true crime programs, to boost audience share (McCready 3-4). This insight sheds light on the processes through which truth is interactively constructed by the Manosphere and how cultural representations of madness contribute to this construction. This is key to understanding the importance of analyzing and bringing these narratives from the deepest recesses of the Manosphere and out to the public so that these social problems can be addressed and their discourse debated.

In previous articles, I have explored the dialogical and interactive relationship between the evolution of the psychiatric field and culture and how certain psychiatric conditions have been effectively "mythicized," to the extent that they exist as pervasive ideas permeating our collective imagination, often diverging significantly from actual psychiatric nosological classifications. The forementioned, heightened interest in true crime programs during the latter half of the twentieth century contributed to a morbid focus on serial killers, elevating them to the status of pop culture heroes and villains, a trend that had a

profound and negative impact on how the general population conceptualized mental health. Erroneous applications of terms like "psychopath" became common, and were indiscriminately assigned to characters ranging from ruthless serial killers to individuals struggling with major depressive disorder or hallucinations (Segura San Miguel, "Outcast Identity" 2-5). Historically, this trend laid the groundwork for mass hysteria surrounding mental health, exacerbated by the increasing awareness of serial killers after the 1970s (Tiburcio Moreno 17-23) and the growing power and hierarchical influence of the psychiatric field, which was therefore allowed to impose tendencies that deviated from a more humanistic approach to mental health. However, while the dialogic relationship between culture and psychiatry has traditionally led to mental health being portrayed—and subsequently read—negatively, the postmodern shift in cinema has presented deeply pathological characters in a more ambiguous light. While this shift is well-intentioned and positive in its capacity to depathologize many conditions and behaviors, and prompts reflection on the borders of otherness and the definition of normalcy *ex negativo*, it has also given rise to some alarming negative developments.

In 2019, the release of Todd Phillips's *Joker* drew attention from mass media for portraying Arthur Fleck—the Joker—not as a traditional villain, contrary to what many people would have expected, but as a victim of circumstances. Although the film, in the end, erroneously furthered the connection between mental illness and violence (Dodgson), the film's initial intention was to present the Joker in an ambiguous light. The audience's partial and reserved sympathy towards the Joker, therefore, was to be expected, but even then, the reaction exceeded all expectations: members of Incel communities organized mass viewings, leading mass media to label the Joker as 'an Incel hero' (Koggan; Johanssen; Araco). The Incel community elevated the Joker to a transcendent category, effectively mythologizing him in the process. Once again, a new dogma, a *doxa*, emerged as a community sought its voice and representations, reflecting another *doxa* which highlights the delicate nature of adopting myths in postmodern societies. The *doxa* of relativism allows people to continue to erect idols for worship, but the moral—and at times absolute—relativism of our era enables the adoption of myths and the idolization of new characters while overlooking the values that once distinguished between good and evil.

Taken to its logical and last consequences, relativism challenges the existence of universal truths, rendering all ideas and actions, regardless of their noxious or destructive nature, open to interpretation, and the erosion of these humanist values influences the mythologizing processes and the ways in which the Manosphere adopts myths (Losada 74-78). Consequently, the Joker can be idolized like a modern Sisyphus whose existence is devoid of meaning, with his murders overlooked as he represents the reaction the Manosphere wants against women and father figures who reject them (Segura San Miguel, "Outcast Identity"). Tyler Durden can be idolized as a modern Prometheus, regardless of his murderous intent, as he symbolizes a reaction against a society that rejects them (Segura San Miguel, "Prometheus Unhinged"). Lastly, Patrick Bateman can be idolized as a modern Narcissus, disregarding the social critique of the book and film, because he epitomizes what members of the Manosphere crave: admiration from women, power, and beauty. The question arises: what fuels the need for this idolization and quest for myths in a postmodern, desacralized society?

In 2016, the hate group Identity Evropa initiated a campaign of hanging posters on college campuses featuring photographs of classical statues which were accompanied by slogans such as "Protect our Heritage," "Let's Become Great Again," or "European Roots, American Greatness." Of particular significance to our discussion is the last slogan; as Zuckerberg explores in *Not All Dead White Men*, the Manosphere has, for two decades, sought to misappropriate classical myths and literature for two primary purposes. Firstly, it aims to reclaim Western, Anglo-Saxon culture as the sole heir to the Graeco-Roman legacies. Secondly, it seeks to foster the construction of a social identity through intergroup discrimination, which is exacerbated by identity and self-esteem issues (Hogg and Abrams; Turner). The Manosphere,

encompassing groups like Men's Rights Activists (MRA), Men Going Their Own Way (MGTOW), Pick-Up Artists (PUA), and Incels, acts as a common descriptor for slightly distinct communities that nevertheless construct a shared social identity around certain core values. These values include the belief in Western culture as a 'gynocracy,' the portrayal of men as a defenseless, victimized group, and the banalization and promotion of violence against women—and uniting against a common enemy: feminism.

The motivations behind the desire to appropriate classical myths and culture, presenting them as both our paramount cultural heritage and exclusive to conservative movements, are readily apparent. Even nowadays, these classical writers, these *scriptores classici*, are considered among the best and most esteemed in the European tradition, and they can therefore lend the Manosphere the intellectual credibility that their tirades and ideas often lack. Simultaneously, these groups have a vested interest in discrediting humanistic approaches to classical culture and myth criticism. Zuckerberg delves into why the Manosphere vehemently claims that only their interpretations of the classics are accurate and valid: this is crucial to shaping their new reality, to wit: their misogynistic ideas are not only justified by the classics, but they are indeed even elevated to the category of core Western values, as rightful heirs to the classic tradition. Many writers within the Manosphere, lacking any in-depth understanding, not only misinterpret the classics but also manipulate their ideas to dishonestly justify advocating violence against women. As an example, the Stoics have been readily embraced by the Manosphere, arguing that writers like Epictetus asserted men's inherent superior capacity for reason and emotional control, thereby allegedly implying women's inferiority.

This concept has also been explored in connection to *American Psycho* by Berthold Schoene, who contends that traditional masculinity has historically been defined as "incontestably rooted in the faculty of reason," (378) and that, as conventional toxic masculinity has been viewed as increasingly outdated and volatile, many traits traditionally associated with males, once seen as strengths legitimizing their hegemonic status, are being reclaimed by the Manosphere. Schoene notes that, since during the twentieth century, traits traditionally coded as feminine, like excessive emotionality, were no longer pathologized as hysteria and, conversely, traits coded as masculine, such as extreme aloofness and a lack of empathy, were now beginning to be pathologized as autism spectrum disorder, many of these men feel the need to vindicate these behavioral characteristics (378). Given the Western tradition of otherizing individuals with psychiatric pathologies, these men may be justified in believing they are under attack. However, their declared enemy, feminism, does not criticize behaviors but rather conducts. Feminists do not condemn men's aloofness but the systemic violence against women that is sometimes facilitated thereby. This is exemplified in Patrick Bateman, whose existential insecurity and nervous agitation, caused by a paradigm shift in understanding gender, result in the "lethal death throes of a formerly hegemonic order of gender" (Schoene 381). Bateman represents the postmodern male who, feeling threatened by postmodern ideas about the need for healthier gender understandings, evades self-loss "by seeking refuge in the self-contained shell of its ego" (Schoene 383), leading to desperation.

Ehrenberg contends that the postmodern man, victim of desperation, "is unable to measure up; he is tired of having to become himself" (4). Delving into the motivations behind the Manosphere's creation of a social identity through intergroup discrimination is not the primary focus of this paper, however. For the sakes of complementing and elaborating the discussion at hand, suffice it to say that the average Manosphere participant, akin to Tyler Durden, cannot *become*, cannot *belong*, and cannot *bond* (Segura San Miguel, "Prometheus Unhinged" 11-12), and thus seeks a re-definition of his identity—formerly rooted on the traditional, toxic notions of masculinity, now called into question. Specifically, they grapple with an "insecure identity" (Ehrenberg 228; Han 41), compelling them to strive towards a better exemplar of a social category—that of masculine—through the imitation of other in-group members (Turner, "Social Categorization…") and advocating violence against those perceived as out-group members (Hogg and

Abrams, "Social Motivation…"). The primary mode of online interaction within this community, predominantly involving the sharing of meme-format images, aligns with what Assmann and Czaplicka describe as "concretion of identity" (128), a process wherein a group reinforces its identity through tangible objects, such as memes. This dissolution of the Self in group identity is not perceived as a loss but rather as a redefinition (McGarty, "Categorization…"), considered as meaningful as personal identity in accordance with social identity theory (Haslam et al*., The New Psychology…*). Similar to men in the Manosphere, Bateman views violence as "a means of exerting control over other people when they feel the need to reclaim power and self-esteem" (Campbell viii). This form of violence has been analyzed as a strategy for ensuring "individual and social control, while maintaining and perpetuating hierarchy and inequality," and it is directed towards individuals who "belong to the dangerous territory beyond the confines of normalized masculine subjectivity" (Hatty 10; 18). It is not surprising, therefore, that participants in the Manosphere aim not only to adopt classical myths but also to mythicize contemporary cultural works. In both instances, disregarding cultural contexts and overlooking intended social critiques provides them with fitting role models that either help them rationalize their hatred towards women or further solidify their perspectives within the Western tradition. This violence, indeed, represents a purging of new *epistemes* through a return to the previous *doxa* of Stoic masculinity.

Regrettably, these instances of misappropriation extend beyond the Stoics and the promotion of logic over emotion; they also encompass the justification of violence, particularly in the form of rape. The Pick-Up Artist community has consistently advocated for Ovid's approaches to seduction in *Ars Amatoria*, arguing that, since the author did not explicitly condemn instances of rape depicted in his *Metamorphoses*, accusations of an abusive approach to seduction can be deflected. Rape, according to this perspective, is construed as a phenomenon that has always existed and has only recently garnered negative connotations due to the Feminist movement. There are good reasons for them to try to conceptualize rape as something other than the crime it is: many of the so-called "seduction techniques" promoted by PUAs align with actions classified as criminal offenses in various countries. These techniques span from deception and harassment to outright sexual abuse (Zuckerberg 110-115). Similarly, the Manosphere often challenges rape statistics and questions their credibility, asserting that approximately 90% of reported cases are likely false (Zuckerberg 150). They attribute this perceived fabrication to women's innate instinct for *dissimulation*, a notion advanced by Arthur Schopenhauer—a Manosphere's favorite—and which describes the tendency of women to "make up fabrications of sexual encounters to ruin a man's name and reputation" (Zuckerberg 148).

The notion that false rape accusations have persisted throughout history and should be attributed more to women's deceptive nature than to men's violence is frequently posited by members of the Manosphere, who support it with references to classical myths. For instance, the extramarital affair between Venus and Ares (Dozier, "Misogynists…") or the myth of Hippolytus and his stepmother Phaedra are cited. In the latter, after Phaedra's advances are rejected by Hippolytus, she lies to her husband Theseus, accusing Hippolytus of rape, leading to the tragic demise of both Hippolytus and Phaedra. Moreover, when acknowledging the possibility of an actual rape, proponents of this perspective often justify and relativize the act by drawing on imagery from classical myths. Examples include the abduction of human women who attracted unwanted attention and suffered sexual violence from gods, like Io, Europa, Callisto; from other men, like Helen of Troy, Briseis, Chryseis, and Lucretia; and even from goddesses who were victims of rape, like Rhea, Hera, Demeter, or Persephone. Certain articles, such as those found on *Return of Kings*—managed by Roosh V, an alt-right blogger who advocated for the decriminalization of rape in 2015—go to the extent of asserting that "having an accusation [of rape] or two to your name is gradually becoming a standard rite of passage for any man of worth" (Zuckerberg 143).

This form of misappropriation extends beyond the Manosphere and is prevalent in the broader context of the alt-right pipeline. The alt-right pipeline is a conceptual model that elucidates the process of internet radicalization leading individuals toward the alt-right movement, and posits that individuals are initially exposed to *seemingly* innocuous anti-SJW (Social Justice Warrior) or anti-feminism memes and images, which serve as a 'gateway drug' toward more radicalizing material, such as white nationalist propaganda and manifestos advocating for the rape or murder of women, immigrants, or leftists. Curtis Dozier has extensively explored the misuse of classical myths by populist hate groups and movements, including alt-right politicians. These groups often misuse classical myths to defend an extremely biased view of the Western cultural canon, purportedly calling for a return to ultraconservative values and the establishment of white ethnostates. The justification for white ethnostates is sometimes grounded in Renaud Camus's theory of "the Great Replacement," asserting that white people are at risk of extinction due to the influx of immigrants. Camus supports this theory with Plato's *Cratylus* and draws a parallel with the mythical war of Troy, contending that "equality, as soon as it leaves its legal and political bed, destroys everything it touches—vessels, ramparts, cities, men—as Aeschylus said Helen of Troy did" (Camus, qtd. in Dozier, "Greco-Roman Antiquity" n.p.).

Similarly, Dozier has conducted an analysis of how Guillaume Faye, a prominent figure in the neo-fascist "French New Right," strategically employs myth with xenophobic intent in his essay "Mars et Héphaïstos: Le retour de l'histoire," characterizing Europe as a Promethean figure that has disseminated the fire of the gods—represented by science and civilization—across the globe, only to face invasion, punishment, and retribution in return (Dozier, "Greek Myth…"). This metaphorical association of Europe with fallen figures which must fight to reclaim their superiority and hierarchy finds resonance among far-right thinkers such as Greg Johnson. Johnson has used similar narratives to argue for the notion that "the better should lead the worse" and to endorse "biological improvement through eugenic population policies" (Johnson, qtd. in Dozier, "Plato, White Supremacy…" n.p.). In addition to these narratives, antifeminist movements have also engaged in the misappropriation of classical myths. The myth of Medusa, for instance, has been extensively used by outlets like *Breitbart News* to criticize figures such as Hillary Clinton. Within the Manosphere, this myth is employed more broadly to label any woman identifying as a feminist, attributing to them an inherent, purportedly misandrist nature (Johnston, "Nasty Woman…"). Furthermore, the French antifeminist group *Les Antigones*, named after the Greek heroine, advocates for a new model of womanhood that would choose death over accepting the erosion of conservative values or traditions (Mac Sweeney et al., "Claiming the Classical…"). All of these instances show that the misappropriation of Patrick Bateman's identity representation is far from being an outlier, and that the adoption of classical myths and the tergiversation of modern characters with spurious intentions are widespread nowadays. The pervasive misuse—and abuse—of myths and classical culture to rationalize misogyny, xenophobia, or violence, as evident in these illustrations, underscores the need for scrutiny and urgent attention from both the academic community and society at large.

Conclusions

The intricate interplay between psychiatry and culture has historically contributed to a predominantly negative portrayal of mental health. However, the postmodern evolution of cinema has yielded instances where characters, originally conceived for social critique, have been co-opted by niche, radicalized communities like the Manosphere. In these instances, both classical myths and newly mythologized characters are employed to substantiate particular narratives. The myth of Narcissus assumes significance in the psychiatric discourse; not only has Narcissism been a longstanding focus of psychoanalysis; its influence extends to Echoism, a term denoting behavior associated with becoming a narcissist's prey

(Fielding). *American Psycho's* protagonist, Patrick Bateman, exhibits traits resonant with mythemes found in the Narcissus myth. While Bateman is not a mythological character, lacking transcendent qualities and rooted in a historical referent, this does not negate the potential social roles these narratives can fulfill: literature has historically served as a powerful conduit for transmitting cultural values, moral admonitions, and reflections on transgression. In a postmodern society characterized by the *doxa* of relativism (Losada 74-78), whereby all narratives are subject to interpretation irrespective of their potentially harmful nature, the peril of elevating characters like Bateman to idol status becomes evident. The endorsement and emulation of Patrick Bateman as a role model, especially among younger men lacking critical skills, poses significant risks. It may inadvertently steer them towards immanent and materialistic pursuits, such as the singular pursuit of wealth, power, and female attention, but also to xenophobic and misogynistic violence.

The deliberate misreading of classical myths and the idolization of new characters demand both academic scrutiny and societal concern. The ongoing radicalization within communities where such discourses proliferate has led to significant consequences, including loss of life and a regressive erosion of the social progress achieved over the past two millennia, as disenfranchised young men are misled by individuals seeking political power. This resistance to feminism mirrors historical patterns seen in Victorian literature, marked by increased violence against women because of "claiming the streets and the public spaces of the city for themselves" (Dryden 62), which provoked "territorial tensions and hostile social acts on the part of men towards women" (Walkowitz 50). Men in the Manosphere, grappling with identity crises amid societal evolution, resort to the creation of a social identity through "interaction with what is outside of us and reflects us" (Bertens 135), resorting to communities which lead them to radicalization and the normalization of violence. Feeling they have been put in an otherized, liminal position, they seek to regain control of the world, and the aim is "no longer to transform […] but to radicalize it," extending their influence and terrorist rhetoric through the alt-right pipeline, "slipping in everywhere like a virus, welling up from all the interstices of power" (Baudrillard 11; 15). I have tried to tie this with how these communities are idolizing characters that they perceive to encompass tragic and transgressive natures, like those of Sisyphus, Prometheus, or Narcissus (Segura San Miguel, "An Outcast's Identity…," "Prometheus Unhinged…."), feeding into the rhetoric that they are victimized characters who need to fight back, a notion which is further cemented by the misappropriation of other classical myths by Manosphere theorists.

Navigating the future course of these social issues remains a complex and uncertain endeavor; nevertheless, the ongoing misappropriation of myths within certain online communities offers valuable insights into potential evolutions of populist, terrorist discourse and its strategic use of cultural narratives. As humanist scholars, it is incumbent upon us to recognize that some of the most influential events shaping contemporary narratives will unfold not in traditional spheres but within online platforms and communities. Addressing this challenge demands a sustained effort to emphasize the importance and relevance of myth in the modern world. Beyond mere recognition, it is essential to actively counter attempts by these communities to control the narrative surrounding myths. This involves upholding humanist values and cultivating a critical spirit, both within academic circles and in broader public discourse. Furthermore, our role must extend beyond the confines of academia. By taking a proactive stance, we can promote humanist values and critical inquiry as a guiding light in navigating the cultural heritage of classical mythology, which will become increasingly important in the future.

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Author:
Jaime SEGURA SAN MIGUEL currently lecturing at Universidad Complutense de Madrid, where he is also a PhD student with a thesis *When Subject Becomes Abject: Identity and Myth in Mad Outcast Characters in the Gothic*. He has recently published "An Outcast's Identity Is No Joke: The Myth of Sisyphus in Joker" (2020) and "Prometheus Unhinged—Madness, Myth, Terrorism, and Outcast Identity in Fight Club" (2022) in *HyperCultura*, "Del Terror al Terrorismo—La Evolución Intermedial del Discurso y el Mito de la Plaga Desde la Novela Gótica a la Cultura Popular" (2022) in *Comares Literatura*, and has two upcoming articles: "Hubris and Nemesis: The Myth of Oedipus in *Crossed: Wish You Were Here"* in *Amaltea: Revista de Mitocrítica* and "Monomyth, Maddening Mothers and Identity—Mother-Daughter Relationships in a Purgatorial World" in *Editorial Oceánide*. His research interests are: Gothic literature, myth criticism, history of psychiatry.

Contact: jaimessm@ucm.es

Min Joo Lee
Occidental College, Los Angeles

Envisioning a Future Reality: South Korean Television Entertainment Programs' Depictions of the US Military Stationed in Korea

Abstract: The US military presence in South Korea [hereby Korea] in the aftermath of the Korean War has been a politically sensitive and contentious issue for Korea. While the relationship between the US military and Korea has often been characterized in Korean popular and scholarly discourse as neocolonial, I argue that in recent years, Korean *yeneung* (television entertainment programs) have been reversing such power dynamics in how they depict US soldiers. They contest the image of Korea as a neocolonial nation-state and portray it as a powerful and aspirational one. Such nationalistic portrayals of the relationship between the two countries coincide with the nation's rise in economic and cultural status. I build on theories derived from Media Studies and scholarship on national identity formation. I use the theoretical framework of "illusions of reality" to analyze the Korean popular media depictions of US soldiers stationed in Korea. I contend that *yeneung* mobilize illusions of reality to depict an aspirational future reality where the neocolonial power dynamics between the US military and Korea are reversed and where stereotypes that the US held of Korea are mirrored and projected back onto the US.

Keywords: South Korea, yeneung, television, US military, neocolonialism

Introduction

Since the onset of the Korean War in 1950, the US has produced dozens of films about the war. Films such as *Steel Helmet* (1951), *Retreat, Hell* (1952), *Men of the Fighting Lady* (1954), and *Battle Hymn* (1957) promoted US stereotypes of Asia and its people as anti-modern, indistinguishable from one another, and in need of Western saviors (Long). Compared to the proliferation of US films about the Korean War during the 1950s-1980s, during the same period, South Korea (hereby Korea) produced a limited number of fictional media about the war and the US military. The limited media depiction was due to a combination of the US military's power over the Korean entertainment industry (Yu Jung Lee) and a lack of interest in such stories from the Korean audience, whose real-life experiences of the war were too fresh in their minds for them to enjoy fictional stories on such topics (Oh).

However, in the twenty-first century, as media depictions of the Korean War in the US have steeply declined to the point that the war is nicknamed "the forgotten war," the Korean entertainment industry's depictions of the Korean War and the US Forces in Korea have been steadily increasing. In particular, leading up to 2023, the seventieth anniversary of the official alliance between the US and Korea, the US Forces stationed in Korea have been featured frequently in Korean popular media. Thus far, many scholars have examined contemporary Korean films' depictions of the Korean War and the role of the US Forces in it (Eperjesi; Hughes; Jackson). Although recognizing their sacrifice during the war is essential, there is limited scholarship that examines depictions of the US Forces as inhabitants of the Korean peninsula beyond the context of war. Furthermore, scholars have yet to explore a unique genre of Korean television entertainment known in Korea as 예능 [*yeneung*] and how they portray the US Forces in the twenty-first century.

Yeneung is an entertainment genre located between fictional films and documentaries in terms of its relationship to reality. It is a unique component of Korean media that has been exported to countries around the world (Green and Epstein; Yoon). *Yeneung* mobilizes a façade of reality that distinguishes it from fictional films or television dramas, most of which do not claim to be realistic. However, *yeneung* is, in fact, highly curated, either through the use of scripts or through heavy editing that pieces together disjointed scenes into well-formulated narratives (Kim). It uses imaginative and narrative powers to supplement reality to create an "illusion of reality" (Kim and Kim). I am borrowing the phrase from Hwanhee Kim and Hoonsoon Kim, who use the term to analyze the mediated techniques of *yeneung*. I expand on their concept to examine how such mediated techniques operate in Korean geopolitical contexts. These scholars argue that, due to illusions of reality, rather than perceiving the genre as fictional, viewers interpret the genre as more "real" than overtly fictive films or television dramas (Kim and Kim). The "realism" of these entertainment programs is enhanced by the unique formats that they use, such as having a group of panelists in a studio watching and commenting on the show, using explanatory subtitles that extensively explain the state of people's emotions and circumstances matter-of-factly, and featuring non-celebrities to diffuse the suspicion of scripted acting. Examining *yeneung*'s depictions of the US military stationed in Korea is important because it provides insight into the types of "illusions of reality" it perpetuates that are consumed within Korea and abroad by hundreds of thousands of viewers whose conceptualization of contemporary Korean nationhood may be deeply influenced by such media portrayals.

I analyzed several themes that cut through these *yeneung*'s coverage of US Forces in Korea. Although many television programs depict them, for the purpose of this article, I analyzed three popular *yeneung* programs: *전설이 떴다 군대스리가 [Gundesliga]* (2022), *백패커 [The Backpacker Chef]* (2022), and *어서와, 한국은 처음이지 [Welcome, First Time to Korea]* (2017-present). I argue that in direct contrast to historical perceptions of the US military as the dominant and overbearing "Other" that inhabits Korea and attempts to acculturate Koreans into the American way of life, these television programs portray the US soldiers as equal partners to Korea, whom the Koreans could easily outmaneuver. Furthermore, the US soldiers are portrayed as being acculturated into Korea or having the potential to be acculturated rather than having the power to acculturate Koreans. I suggest that television programs mobilize such illusions of reality to reimagine the nation's relationship with the US Forces. The programs move beyond the binary framework of conceptualizing the US military either as subjects of resistance or saviors to whom Koreans should be eternally grateful because they liberated South Korea from the threat of communism. Rather than engaging in such binary, the illusions of reality in *yeneung* portray an aspirational "reality" where Korea not only has the power to be equal partners with the US but also possesses an ideal modernity and supposedly a superior culture that facilitates the assimilation of the US soldiers into Korean ways of life.

Illusions of Reality as a Framework to Examine Korean Media Depictions of US Forces

Most visual forms of representation have illusionary characteristics (Allen). Illusions differ from delusions in that the latter are false beliefs utterly devoid of reality and not influenced by it. In contrast, the former are influenced by reality and prone to change based on the changes in reality. Media operate through an art of illusion that facilitates belief and imagination in their viewers (Kim and Kim; Lopes). Although the mediated images are not real in that the viewers are not physically experiencing and witnessing them in real-time, they entertain viewers by providing them with illusions of realistic experiences and feelings. In that regard, mediated illusions blur temporality. The media filmed in the past (before viewers' consumption) are experienced as the present reality for the viewers. *Yeneung* mobilize such illusions of reality to elicit an experience that blurs the past and the present with an imagined future.

I suggest that the recently popular Korean *yeneung* envision an aspirational future reality. While popular culture theorists, such as Roland Barthes, claim that mediated illusions are "an illusion of the presence of something that is past" (Barthes as cited in Allen 42), I argue that mediated illusions of reality not only memorialize the past but also memorialize an aspirational future. Mediated illusion's ability to memorialize both the past and the future bears a resemblance to how nation-states mobilize illusions of shared history and future goals to maintain national boundaries and identities.

Although illusions and imaginations may sound trivial and antithetical to reality, they are vital to people's conceptualization of their positionality in the world (Appadurai; Tsing). Imaginations and illusions are especially relevant to national identity formation, as nations are built through collective imagination and the illusion of togetherness (Anderson; Shlapentokh; Spivak "Nationalism and the Imagination"). The arbitrary national boundaries are sustainable through illusions of shared heritage, history, experiences, and desires. Media shape such national illusions and imaginations. These media are not merely descriptive but also prescriptive in that they provide national subjects with images and languages to define their national identities (Burgess).

The mediated illusions of reality and the illusions that shape national identities intersect with each other in a multitude of ways. Both types of illusions are strong binding forces that grip people's attention to the "reality" they convey. Both types of illusions are disseminated through media. For instance, Benedict Anderson refers to newspapers and other forms of print media as foundational in assisting the formation of nations because they would make everyone reading the same text during the same time period feel as if they had many things in common. The two types of illusions diverge in one aspect. In contrast to the illusions that Anderson points to as foundational in national formation, Korean media conveying illusions of reality are not limited to national audiences: both national and global audiences consume them.

The significant role that imaginations and illusions play in shaping both a compelling media narrative and nationhood makes critical analysis of *yeneung* dealing in topics of nationhood all the more important. Numerous empirical studies have shown television's significant role in formulating national narratives and identities (Abu-Lughod; Mankekar). As a genre of popular culture that operates through illusions of reality and as a genre that millions of Koreans and foreign viewers from around the world consume, *yeneung*'s depictions of the relationship between the US military and Korea have the power to influence viewers to imagine a possible reality that reverses the current sociopolitical status quo.

Historical Context of the US-Korea Relations

The status quo of the relationship between the US military and Korea since the 1950s has been arguably neocolonial. Neocolonialism is a method of governance that nations implement to maintain their power over their unofficial colonial nations (Spivak "Neocolonialism and the Secret Agent of Knowledge"). While these neocolonized nations technically have sovereignty and independence, realistically, they are not entirely independent but rather serve as "client states" (Uzoigwe 62). The logic for neocolonialism is often mired in the discourse of honorable intentions, such as the desire to help "modernize" the nation (Uzoigwe). However, in reality, such benign intentions mask a more deleterious outcome for the neocolonized country (Grydehøj et al.).

Theories regarding neocolonialism are applicable to the US-Korea relations. Korea has never been a colonial state of the US, but it has been perpetually a neocolonial state of the US, where the US military has resided for decades. They had a profound impact in shaping Korean politics and culture. For instance, in the aftermath of the Korean War, the US Department of State wrote a "Reorientation Plan for Korea," which symbolically affirmed their desire to change the national culture and to reorient it to be akin to American culture (Armstrong 92).

According to some scholars, the neocolonial sentiments have been internalized by some Koreans. For instance, Seungsook Moon contends, "[…] the denial of self-rule has been internalized by Koreans themselves through the modern governmentality; this is well reflected by the South Korean state's reluctance since 2012 to take back the wartime OPCON [operational control] when the US state was willing to return it" (513). The internalization of the neocolonial mentality sometimes influences the Korean government to implement policies in favor of the US (Doolan; Jin-kyung Lee; Na Young Lee; Park). As a case in point, Camp Humphreys, one of the US bases in Korea, featured prominently in the *yeneung* programs I analyze in this article, was built on Koreans' privately-owned farmland without their consent. The Korean government implemented coercive tactics against its citizens to expand Camp Humphreys, such as sending more than ten thousand police officers to stand guard against the protesters. While most residents realized the futility of fighting against the government and moved of their own accord, ultimately, roughly forty-four families were forcibly removed against their will (Choi). Even though the camp is on Korean soil, it is, in effect, no longer a Korean land and is a place that is inaccessible to most Koreans.

Koreans were historically relegated to the outskirts of the military camps in camp towns, where they engaged in various forms of service work for the US soldiers, including sexual labor (Doolan; Katharine HS Moon). In popular Korean conception, camp towns were shameful spaces that symbolized the nation's inferiority and weakness (Cheng). However, I contend that the yeneung programs I analyze in this article mobilize illusions of reality to erase camp towns from view and reclaim the campground as a national territory.

Although I agree to a certain extent with the scholars who claim Koreans are suffering from an internalized neocolonial mindset, I contend that neocolonialism by itself is limited in scope for explaining the complex ways that Koreans have negotiated their relationship with the US military in recent years. Much has changed in the past two decades to revive Korean nationalism with a new fervor. Since the 2000s, Korean popular culture, and Korean culture at large, has been experiencing international popularity in a phenomenon called *Hallyu* (Jang et al.). Fans from all over the world consume popular culture from Korea and travel to Korea as tourists to experience the culture in person. Now, Korean is one of the most popular languages taught in American universities (Pickles), thousands of foreign women, including Americans, travel to Korea to form intimate relations with Korean men (Min Joo Lee; Takeda), the nation's films win the Oscars, and its popular music blares on American radio and television. Korean news media coverage of these events cannot be fully explained through the solitary framework of neocolonialism.

I contend that *yeneung*'s illusions of reality are based upon the reality of Korea's meteoric rise in economic and cultural status. While some Koreans in the past felt as if they were inferior to white Westerners (Creighton; Schober), due to the country's dramatic rise in status, such is not necessarily the case in the twenty-first century (Alex Jong-Seok Lee). *Yeneung* take such pride a step further to envision an aspirational future reality that reverses the neocolonial dynamic with cultural power. I contribute to the existing literature by examining ways that Korean *yeneung* reimagine the power dynamic between the US Forces and Korea in ways that go beyond the framework of internalized neocolonialism. Rather than situating the US as the one always in power, the *yeneung* that I examine in this essay reverse the narrative of power between the two parties by using illusions of reality that blur the temporality of the present and the future. Through such blurred temporality, they presume Korea's trend of cultural ascendance will continue. Based on such optimism for the future, they preemptively celebrate the nation's supposedly aspirational culture and its power to acculturate US soldiers by examining a few cases of acculturation occurring in *yeneung* and aspiring for that to be a significant cultural phenomenon in the future.

Methods

I used purposive sampling—a non-probability sampling of specific individuals, locations, or cultural events—to select the Korean television entertainment programs depicting US soldiers stationed in Korea (Lacy et al.). I searched for the term 주한미군 [American Soldiers Stationed in Korea] combined with the term 예능 [entertainment] on the Korean search engine Naver. I excluded the shows that discussed American soldiers but did not feature them.[55] I chose three shows that aired since 2020 with episodes dedicated to depicting the US Forces in Korea: *Gundesliga*, *The Backpacker Chef*, and *Welcome, First Time to Korea*. Although I primarily focus on critically analyzing these three *yeneung*, to supplement my analyses of them, I further analyzed one televised *yeneung* featuring US Forces in Korea that aired in the 2010s, one that featured American veterans but not ones stationed in Korea, and two online-exclusive *yeneung* featuring a Korean American soldier who received both Korean and American special forces training. Overall, I collected data from approximately one thousand nine hundred minutes of *yeneung*. All of the television programs were in Korean. I am responsible for the English translations of the dialogues used throughout this article.

I chose to analyze these television shows for this article because they were literally and figuratively "breaking new ground." *The Backpacker Chef* is the first Korean television show to film in Camp Humphreys. *Gundesliga* promoted itself as the first Korean television entertainment program to showcase a soccer match between US soldiers and Korean men. Prior to these programs, Camp Humphreys was not open to most Korean civilians. In the meantime, *Welcome, First Time to Korea* was the first *yeneung* to feature a US soldier stationed in Korea as the main character for such an extended period (on and off over the span of three years). Prior *yeneung*, which featured US soldiers in Korea, would use them as backdrops rather than as the program's main characters. I found the Korean television programs' desire to depict the US military in Korea through their own lens appropriate to reinforce my argument that these *yeneung* envision an aspirational future reality. The US and Korean military were equal partners in such an aspirational future reality. Korea is a subject of envy for the US due to its ability to balance modernization with tradition perfectly. Lastly, in such images of aspirational future reality, Korea has the ability to acculturate American soldiers into the Korean way of life rather than the other way around. In the following sections, I discuss my observations in more depth.

The Narrative of Equal Partnership: Reclaiming the Korean Land and Body

In recent years, many of the *yeneung* featuring US Forces in Korea have taken place at Camp Humphreys, the largest US military base located outside of the US. In depicting the camp, which is inaccessible to most Koreans, these *yeneung* unanimously focus on depicting it as belonging to Koreans. For instance, *The Backpacker Chef* is a *yeneung* program where a group of famous Korean chefs and celebrities travel to cafeterias in different parts of Korea to cook food for a large group of people. The program visits locations such as Korean military camps, kindergartens, hospitals, and schools.

Although a cooking program, a significant part of the episodes 8 and 9 at Camp Humphreys focus on highlighting the alliance between the US and Korean soldiers. For instance, in one scene, a shot of the dining hall where the team of chefs and celebrities are eating a meal suddenly shifts to an aerial shot of the camp. The subtitle on the screen says, "At Camp Humphreys, there are numerous memorials dedicated to the Korean and American soldiers who fought side by side during the Korean War" (1:22:02).[56] The

[55] For instance, television programs such as *이제 만나러 갑니다* [*Now On My Way to Meet You*] that address the relationship between the two Koreas often mention the US soldiers stationed in Korea, but do not feature them on the show.

[56] Korean entertainment programs often use subtitles on screen for comedic or explanatory purposes.

camera zooms in on a white stone memorial with carved lettering commemorating soldiers from both nations. In quick succession, the program depicts various parts of the camp commemorating the soldiers of both nationalities. The subtitle says, "To never forget their sacrifice and to maintain the current state of peace, the KATUSA [Korean Augmentation to the United States Army] fight at the forefront of the US-Korea alliance with the Korean flag on their right shoulder" (1:22:25). The screen shows a Korean flag on a soldier's shoulder and zooms out to depict them busy with training. The subtitle says, "They fight alongside the US soldiers and work together with them. They are the diplomats of the military who toil every day. Chef Baek will put his heart into his dishes to serve them delicious food" (1:23:00).

Through images and subtitles on screen, the program emphasizes the equal partnership between Korea and the US by reclaiming ownership of the Korean land that has historically been subjected to neocolonial ownership by the US Forces stationed in Korea. In some ways, Camp Humphreys symbolizes the Korean government's internalized neocolonial mindset and the US Forces' assertion of their neocolonial power over Korean land. After all, it being the biggest US base outside of the US territories implies the willingness of the Korean nation-state to forfeit autonomy over a substantial part of its land to the US. However, by depicting Korean names memorialized on the campground and of Korean men training there, the program creates a perception that the campground belongs as equally to Koreans as it does to the US military.

In the illusion of reality depicted in the *Backpacker,* whereby the camp belongs to Koreans, camp towns are erased from view. Unlike other episodes where the program shows a team of chefs and celebrities navigating their way to the school or the hospital where they will be cooking by car, the episodes depicting Camp Humphreys begin at the camp entrance. Although camp towns still exist in Pyeongtaek, where the camp is located, they are effectively erased from view to emphasize the message that Koreans belong within the camp just as much as they belong outside of it. Through the illusion of reality created through erasure, a sense of inferiority is replaced by a sense of equal partnership and ownership.

In the program, the Koreans belong on the campground as equal partners. In the past, American soldiers would refer to the KATUSA—the Korean soldiers working with the US forces—as "'my KATUSA,' reflecting an ownership and entitlement over the demasculinized Korean male body" (Gage 142). However, the television program rejects such a sense of master-laborer dynamic by emphasizing the partnership aspect of the KATUSA and claiming that they are not simply soldiers but "diplomats," which implies that they negotiate with the US as their equals or superiors to preserve the Korean nation's best interests. The illusion of reality in the television program reflects a renewed sense of nationalism and superiority among some Koreans and envisions a reality where such nationalist sentiments come true. The past (production process prior to consumption), the present (moment of consumption), and the future (aspirations for the scenes in the program to become ubiquitous reality) blur together to portray Korea as powerful and not subjected to neocolonial relationships. At least for the episode's duration, the viewers experience an illusory sense of liberation from neocolonial subjecthood. In other words, nationalist desires are realized through the illusions of *yeneung*.

Gundesliga also takes place at Camp Humphreys and, like *The Backpacker Chef*, focuses a considerable part of the program on emphasizing the equal partnership between the US Forces and Korea. The program features the Korean national soccer team from the 2002 Korea-Japan World Cup. The team travels to various military bases in Korea to engage in a soccer match with the soldiers. In the program's final episode, after visiting and losing to a multitude of Korean soldiers, the team visits Camp Humphreys. Regal music plays in the background as the screen shows various shots of the camp, including the memorial that the *Backpackers* also showed, where the Korean and US flags are drawn side by side to commemorate the fallen soldiers of both nationalities. As the scene changes to show soldiers from both nations training with helicopters and staring at large maps that cover the entire wall, the subtitle says, "America is Korea's

reliable ally since the 1953 Mutual Defense Treaty […] Camp Humphreys is the biggest US Army base in Asia" ("Wow, How Fit are They...?" 00:00:25).

This particular *yeneung* precludes the assumption of the US neocolonial power through a role-play that trivializes the US military presence in Korea. At the Camp, the hosts jokingly announce to the Korean players that since they are at Camp Humphreys, which follows US law and has an American zip code, they will be playing soccer while conversing exclusively in English. The Korean soccer players initially appear dismayed as they try to practice speaking in English. They attempt to engage in casual conversation in English. However, the role-play quickly disintegrates within a few seconds as they communicate in Korean. The scene ends with them deciding that it is okay to be bad at English because they will prove their power through their soccer skills. Korean music, titled *Champions*, plays in the background as the scene ends as if to affirm that the Koreans will be the "champions" in this competition with the US military. While the reality of English being a global language does not change through contrary depictions in a television program, the illusion of reality displayed on the program provides the narrative that competent Korean men do not need to be fluent in English because they can communicate their superiority through their skills in their craft—in this case, soccer.

The illusion of reality displayed in *Gundesliga* and *The Backpacker Chef* mixes reality and fiction to depict a more egalitarian relationship between the two nations. The reality is sidelined to provide space for more nationalistic depictions of the Koreans memorialized on the campground and the presence of the KATUSA as "diplomats" in the camp. Although these images depict a small part of a complex reality, through careful editing and scripted scenes, the illusions of reality envision a future aspirational reality where it may come true. Some Koreans' emotional sense of superiority over the US soldiers becomes realistic experiences through the illusions of reality on screen.

The Culture of Generosity, Abundance, and Affluence

A key aspect of Korea's renewed nationalism and confidence in the nation's power is its reliance on its supposed affluence. For instance, the program *Welcome, First Time to Korea* features an American soldier, David, and his family's experience living in Korea. It focuses on the family's appraisal of the nation's affluence and their acculturation into Korean culture. In one episode, when the family goes on a picnic, the camera follows the family's car from behind as they drive through the busy streets of Seoul. Inside the vehicle, David says as he is driving, "There are trees everywhere, mountains, cityscape" (00:04:00 in the episode that aired on 6/25/2020). The scene shows their car weaving through skyscrapers one moment and then leafy green trees the next. Stephanie, his wife, says, "Yeah! Skyscrapers, trees, a river, mountains! Everything! We're so lucky to live here," (00:04:06) as she leans back into her seat with a satisfied smile on her face. In this scene, Korea is characterized as a land that has "everything," including nature, that it has managed to conserve while concurrently building modern skyscrapers.

This theme of perfect modernity and abundance reoccurs throughout many episodes featuring David and his family, especially in relation to Korean culinary culture. The abundance and affluence are explained through the logic of 한국의 정 [Korean culture of generosity]. When the family visits *Jeolla* Province, known in Korea as the region with exquisite traditional food, the family is treated to a meal comprised of dozens of side dishes. The camera takes a close-up of the four family members' amazed faces as the servers bring out endless streams of side dishes to the table. At the end of the scene, the hosts, who are watching the filmed episode in a studio and adding commentaries to it or asking questions to David, who is also sitting in the studio along with them, praise Korea for its culture of affluence and generosity. David says, "In America, you don't get side dishes like that. Anything on the table, you specifically order and pay for" (01:15:49 in the episode that aired 12/17/2020). The Italian male host Alberto says, "You have to pay for each banchan when you're abroad" (01:16:00). Christian, a Mexican male host, agrees and says, "You even

have to pay for water" (01:16:02). Alberto concludes the appraisal of Korean culinary culture by saying, "You can refill all the side dishes in Korea for free" (01:16:06). David juxtaposes the two culinary cultures by saying that America is too capitalistic—only giving food that one pays for—while claiming that Korea is a land of luxury and generosity. The other hosts on the show, from different parts of the world, echo such sentiment to proclaim Korea as the most generous.

Korea is juxtaposed with other countries through the multinational hosts and David's recounting of their experiences overseas versus in Korea to emphasize the latter's supposed abundance, affluence, and a culture of generosity stemming from such abundance. Using terms such as "Korean generosity," this *yeneung* positions affluence and generosity as an innate part of Korean culture. The illusions of reality perpetuated in this program imply that Korea has the perfect balance of modernity and tradition compared to the US or other Western nations that supposedly have become too capitalistic or modernized and lost their humanity.

This illusion of reality is in direct contrast to the stereotype of Asia perpetuated through techno-Orientalism. Through techno-Orientalist rhetoric, the US often claims itself to be the standard of modernity while maligning Asian nations as either too backward or too modern (Sharon Heijin Lee; Roh et al.). East Asian countries, in particular, have been stereotyped as too modernized and, therefore, having lost their sense of tradition and humanity. However, this *yeneung* reverses such stereotype to imagine Korea as the perfect model of modernity that maintains a tradition of generosity and humanity while also possessing modern advancements.

Alongside the supposedly engrained affluent and generous characteristics of Korean culture, the program proclaims the nation as a country of affluence derived from advanced technologies. For instance, even things as mundane as bug bite patches become modern technology for David's family. The family is all in the car, and in the front seat, Stephanie opens a bag and says, "I've never seen these before, but these are bug bite patches." She applies a round peach-colored patch on the children's bug bites, and David says, "How come I've never heard of these before? They don't have these in America?" (00:46:48 in the episode that aired 10/21/2021) Stephanie says, "I wanna buy these and send them back home to people" (00:47:21). Through Stephanie and David's dialogue, the bug bite patch is turned into a technological innovation that does not exist in America, which they should buy from Korea and send back to their family and friends in the US. The program completely reverses the assumption that America is a land of affluence and the place where many laborers travel to make money and buy goods unavailable in their home countries to send home to their families (Goldstein).

The illusions of reality mobilized by these *yeneung* move beyond the politically binary framework of the US as either the saviors or neocolonizers of Korea. Instead, they reframe the relationship between the two nations so that the US is perceived as an equal militaristic partner but inferior in its modernity compared to Korea. The programs establish such claims through expertly executed scenes of the camp and through the words of an American soldier and his family. While the US has long established itself as the standard of modernity for other countries around the world and used the US forces to convey such a message (Sharon Heijin Lee), in these *yeneung*'s illusions of reality, Korea becomes the standard. In contrast, the US becomes an inadequately modern nation that has become inhumanely capitalistic and lagging in technological innovations. *Welcome, First Time to Korea* utilizes an American soldier and his family to demonstrate Korea's supposed model modernity, thereby symbolically reversing the role of the US force from distributors of modernity to those who need to learn from Korea's ideal modernity and acculturate into Korea.

Acculturation in Reverse: The US Soldiers' Acculturation into Korea

David's family made intermittent appearances on *Welcome, First Time to Korea* over the span of three years. Hence, the program consciously tracks how acculturated the family has become. For instance, over several years, the program shows the growth in the family's Korean language skills and the effort they put into learning the language. In the first episode of their appearance on the program, David and his wife Stephanie introduce themselves in Korean haltingly. While sitting on a couch facing the camera, David says in Korean, "My name is David Row, and I am an American who has lived in Korea for three months" (00:01:53 in the episode that aired 5/20/2020). Stephanie says, "I am a housewife, my name is Stephanie," (00:02:01) also in Korean. The Korean hosts looking at their video from the studio clap their hands in amazement and say, "Three months," "They're very fluent!" (00:02:06) The couple express their desire for the entire family, including the two children, to be able to communicate fluently in Korean: "One of our main priorities now is for them to learn Korean to hopefully learn the language very quickly. And our whole family could speak Korean together" (00:13:21). Several months later, the program revisits the family and shows them eating breakfast at a restaurant. The couple sit down at a table and look at the menu. The camera zooms into the menu to show that it is only written in Korean. The hosts in the studio worry about whether the couple will be able to read Korean and order delicious food. As if to respond to the hosts' queries, the couple begins reading the Korean menu aloud and explaining the menu to each other. They fluently order pork broth soup for themselves and ham fried rice for the children, and when the food comes out, they eat it with gusto. One of the Korean male hosts remarks, "You drink that pork broth like my uncle" (00:09:39 in the episode that aired 12/17/2020), implying that David has fully become Korean to the point that he resembles an ethnic Korean middle-aged man's eating habits. The subtitle on the screen says, "Their Korean skills leveled up since last time" (00:07:43), emphasizing the seamless acculturation into Korean culture that the family is experiencing. The Korean hosts on the show proclaim David as Korean by likening him to a Korean middle-aged man.

Apart from language, the show portrays the family acculturating into Korean culture in other ways, including through sports. The segment titled "David's Family's Morning Workout" begins with an aerial shot of the two children in a spacious living room on top of a yoga mat. When David appears, the program draws a computer graphic of a red hat on his head, which, in Korean military culture, symbolizes an instructor in the military. The camera captures a close-up of the children standing still with their feet clinched together, and the hosts say in Korean, "They are that regimented?" (00:10:34 in the episode that aired 5/20/2020) The subtitle says, "The military family is regimented regardless of what they are doing," (00:10:37) and background music of a famous Korean military song plays as the hosts comment about the children's rigor. David explains, "I did Taekwondo for about ten years. It instills discipline and builds character, and I think that would be really good for them" (00:11:27). He looks at his wife, seated next to the couch, and she also nods in agreement and echoes that she would love the kids to learn the sport. The Korean hosts exclaim in amazement at David's explanation of the pros of the sport. The camera takes a close-up of David teaching his son and daughter the moves. The camera zooms out to show Stephanie using a large Elsa doll to encourage the kids to follow the movements.

Noteworthy in this scene is the Korean military symbolism overlaid on David, an American soldier, and the depictions of Taekwondo, a Korean national sport, as a family-friendly activity promoted by David. Rather than having the Korean hosts talk about the positive aspects of practicing Taekwondo, the program has David explain them, thereby borrowing his mouth to justify the supposed superiority of Korean culture. He is portrayed as fully acculturated into Korean culture through the red hat and the Korean military song that plays in the background as he practices Taekwondo. The Korean military music repeatedly plays throughout the different episodes featuring David, and very rarely does the program use American military symbols, such as the American flag or the eagle, when David appears on the screen.

The illusion of Korea's supposed cultural superiority extends to depictions of competitive sporting events. *Gundesliga* juxtaposes Koreans' experiences during the 2002 World Cup when the Korean and US teams competed against each other and a rematch in 2022 between the 2002 Korean World Cup team veterans and the US soldiers stationed in Korea. During the 2002 World Cup, Korean male soccer players were hailed in national media as "warriors" who were defeating other countries and raising Korea's national status (Joo). The military is a big part of the Korean nation and masculine identity because all able-bodied men must undergo several years of mandatory military service. Even after they finish their military service, they operate as "warriors in suits" who perform their gender that is "deeply rooted in the habitus shaped through the military experience" (Kwon; Lee et al. 1482). Such militant metaphors influence the actions of individuals.

In 2002, the overarching sentiment was that Korean soccer players were warriors who must defeat foreign teams and make the nation proud. The warrior mentality against the US reached its peak in 2002 because of social events such as a Korean ice skater being unfairly disqualified from the Olympics due to an American skater claiming that the Korean competitor pushed him. Concurrently that year, two young Korean girls were killed by American soldiers riding in armored vehicles. Both incidents felt incredibly unfair to many Koreans, and to many, they symbolized Korea's status as the ultimate victim of the US's power. At the time, the commentators of the World Cup repeatedly mentioned that the Korean warriors must win the game against the US. The game became a symbolic battleground where Korea could exact revenge and seek justice because they could not do so in real life.

However, in the 2022 *yeneung*, such militant discourse and sense of hostility are hard to find as they are replaced by a sense of leisure and confidence in Korea's power. The game begins by showing the Korean veteran soccer players walking onto the field and getting cheered by the crowd. Initially, the camera captures the crowd from afar, and it is hard to tell the crowd's demographics. Eventually, the camera zooms into the crowd to show it is comprised of people of all genders and races. "They're on our side" ("Let's Find the Winner " 00:11:00), one player says as the crowd starts chanting *Dae-Han-Min-Guk* [South Korea]. The camera takes an even further close-up of the crowd to show the KATUSA wearing their uniform, chanting, and clapping their hands with the subtitle "The KATUSA who are greeting the team happily" (00:11:18), and pans to the side to show the crowd of foreigners with the subtitle "and the Americans who love Korea" (00:11:21). As the camera zooms out again, the subtitle says, "Both sides are prepared to enjoy the game" (00:11:33), showing the crowd laughing and enjoying each other's company. The desire for vengeance in 2002 is no longer present in the 2022 television program.

The relaxed attitude throughout the game from the crowd and the commentators appears to come from their confidence in their ability to beat the American team. If many people doubted Korea's chances during the 2002 World Cup, in 2022, the people on the program seem to have no doubt that the Koreans could win. At the beginning of the game, an American soldier body slams a Korean player, and the subtitle says, "The American team is very physical as anticipated" ("(50 Minutes) " 00:00:48). A few minutes later, a Korean player body-checks an American soldier and leaves behind two players while dribbling the ball. The camera shifts to the stands to show a white girl, supposedly holding up two fingers and saying, "He got past two players!" At least that is what the subtitle claims she said, although a closer lip reading reveals that she just said, "That was two!" (00:10:11) which is more ambiguous than the subtitle implies. She could have meant that she thought there were two foul plays for the Korean player, or maybe she was talking about something else. However, the subtitle matter-of-factly claims that Korean players are as physical as American players to the point that a white girl on the stand is amazed by a Korean man's power. The screen shows the Korean player with the subtitle, "His physical play is admired even by US soldiers" (00:10:14), as the player shrugs his shoulders and laughs with an American player after the physical

altercation. The program's emphasis on the scene establishes parity between the two teams early in the game, and ultimately, the Korean team wins.

The illusion of reality displayed in this *yeneung* program is not entirely fictitious. Rather, it is built upon some Koreans' real sense of superiority over American soldiers (Gage). It expands on those feelings to imagine a situation where Korea can culturally compete with America and win.

Conclusions

The American military presence in Korea has significantly shaped modern Korean national identity. They had a profound influence on the nation's culture, economy, and politics. Due to the US military's significant impact on all aspects of Korea, the Korean media was reserved in depicting them. This created a rather unidirectional media flow whereby Hollywood actively produced films about the Korean War for domestic and international viewers, while the Korean perspective of how they conceptualize and depict the US soldiers was largely absent in the transnational media scene.

With its steep rise in economic and cultural status during the past few years, many Korean *yeneung* leading up to 2023, the seventieth anniversary of the alliance between Korea and the US, portrayed US Forces in Korea in television programs that are exported all over the world. These television programs are not only shaped by but also shape reality through illusions of reality. The genre mixes reality with fantasies to reimagine the relationship between Korea and the US. The shared themes in these programs' illusions of reality provide insight into how the US military is conceptualized in contemporary Korean television in ways that diverge from the US conception of its own positionality in Korea. The *yeneung* programs portray the US military as equal partners to Korea rather than the ones with hierarchical superiority. In these illusions, Korea is a land of abundance that possesses both a tradition of generosity and new and convenient technology. By such logic, due to the nation's perfect mixture of the old and the new to form an ideal modern society, it acculturates US soldiers stationed in Korea rather than the other way around. Korea's growth in economic and cultural power realistically and numerically cannot beat that of the US. Still, the underlying sentiment in the illusions of reality is a sense of Korea's superiority or parity with the US.

Such illusions of reality and the resultant reimagination of Korean national identity have both positive and negative consequences attached to them. After all, illusions and imaginations have the power to both establish and destabilize nationalism. The positive outcome of these media depictions is that they complicate the long-established hierarchy that positions America as the magnanimous savior who unidirectionally sends modern technology and culture to Korea. The mediated illusions of reality demonstrate how the exchange is multidirectional and complicates the hierarchy. However, the negative consequence of such nationalism is that it focuses only on men. For instance, to a certain extent, both *Gundesliga* and *The Backpacker Chef*, as well as *Welcome, First Time to Korea*, are primarily comprised of Korean men with minimal presence of Korean women. The program juxtaposes Korean men and US soldiers, which excludes women from the framework of the newly imagined Korean national identity. Further and more extensive research into different genres of Korean media, such as news reports, documentaries, fictional films, and fictional dramas, will reveal a more comprehensive picture of how Korean cultural conceptions of the US military are evolving over time.

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Author:
Min Joo LEE is a Mellon Postdoctoral Fellow and an Assistant Professor in the Department of Asian Studies at Occidental College, Los Angeles. Her research interests include the transnational dissemination of Korean popular culture and the contemporary Korean politics of gender and race. Lee is working on a book project on the transnational popularity of Korean popular culture.

Contact: mlee4@oxy.edu

Elham Hosseini
University of Western Cape, South Africa (PhD Candidate)

Miki Flockemann
University of Western Cape, South Africa (Extraordinary professor)

Facing the World, All Alone: New Perspectives on Iran's Nuclear Negotiations Via Ehsan Abdipour's *All Alone*

Abstract: The major focus of the present paper is *All Alone* (2013), an Iranian film by Ehsan Abdipour which narrates the life of a boy from Boushehr, whose friendship with the son of a Russian engineer at a nuclear plant has to end as the result of the sanctions against Iran's nuclear capacity at the time. Using the lens of young adults and children, the film tangibly illustrates the impact of the sanctions on the lives of individuals. The power of cinematic representation in highlighting the significance of child perspectives is that it can reveal the human effect of sanctions not directly addressed in the adult world. In addition, the liminal position of the pre-adolescent can provide new space for negotiating the 'unspoken' or unrecognized effects of the sanctions. At the same time, as an Iranian who followed the progress of nuclear talks closely between 2013-2015, the recent release of Christopher Nolan's *Oppenheimer* (2023) triggered an immediate association with recollections about the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), known more commonly as Iran's Nuclear Deal. In particular, Oppenheimer's self-reflexive recollections of the questions he grappled with as a youth about the nature of the universe struck a chord with the dilemma faced by the young protagonist in *All Alone.* In the light of this, the paper will also briefly consider the controversies around nuclear talks at the time *All Alone* was made.

Keywords: Child-centered cinema, cinematic representation, Iran's nuclear program, *All Alone*

> "I was homesick, emotionally immature, troubled by the visions of a hidden universe" (*Oppenheimer*, 3:32-45)
>
> "Dear Mr. Najafpour, is there a job in the world to turn one's nightmares into sweet dreams?" (*All Alone*, 1:27:43-52) [57]

Introduction

The prime purpose of this paper is to demonstrate the adverse impact of the economic sanctions on the lives of Iranian citizens through a specific cinematic representation, *All Alone* by Ehsan Abdipour. *All Alone* stands out for its depiction of young pre-adolescents in Boushehr who become directly involved with the challenges of nuclear negotiations and sanctions. Boushehr plays a key role in creating the events of the narrative since it is the remote province where a major nuclear power plant is located, on the southern shores of Iran at the border of the Persian Gulf and the Oman Sea. After providing a context to the film, I will focus on the effects created by child-centered cinema in Iran, which will lead into an analysis of the film's structure. That in turn will tie the film to the theoretical notions of child representation in cinema, specifically Iranian cinema. Additionally, some discussions will be included to also reflect on how

[57] All translations from the original Farsi in *All Alone* are my own.

the child's perspective can penetrate into apparently hidden spaces and thus offer a glimpse into events behind the scenes of the first round of nuclear talks.

What sparked the present piece, was the international screening of Christopher Nolan's *Oppenheimer* which coincided with the release of Greta Gerwig's *Barbie* in July 2023, and their close competition at the box office suggested that a strong interest in the narrativization of scientific and political history is on a par with ongoing interest in the politics of gender. Yet, reflecting on an Iranian film, with close relations to the nuclear program against a back-drop of a cinematic representation of J. Robert Oppenheimer might seem controversial. In fact, given the general suspicions around Iran's nuclear program, the parallel might even suggest that Iran's Nuclear Deal was nothing more than an agreement between the negotiating countries to permit Iran to begin developing a nuclear bomb.

The connection between two remotely similar subjects on the surface thus needs to be clarified at the outset, though obviously Oppenheimer's mission in inventing the most notorious means of mass destruction is distinctively different from the attempts of Iran's nuclear negotiating teams,[58] which included both scientists and political representatives, to define the limits of Iran's nuclear program. Yet, one aspect the two cases have in common was the illusion of having control over their research, or else, safeguarding the outcome of negotiations, which is a slippery slope when it comes to political interests. To explain further, in the aftermath of the atomic bombardment of Japan, Oppenheimer, experiencing a crisis of conscience, attempted to warn American politicians against the further development of nuclear armament, yet he faced hostility from his rivals who, like Lewis Stauss, supported nuclear retaliation, and this is best described in the Pulitzer prize-winning biography, *American Prometheus: The triumph and Tragedy of J Robert Oppenheimer* (2005): "Oppenheimer gave us atomic fire. But then, when he tried to control it, when he sought to make us aware of its terrible dangers, the powers that-be, like Zeus, rose up in anger to punish him" (Bird and Sherwin 15). On the other hand, Iran's second negotiating team, headed by the former foreign minister, made a successful endeavor to break the international consensus against Iran by pledging a transparent nuclear program in return for revoking the threat of UN resolutions and the lifting of sanctions. However, though similar in reception, the negotiation teams' endeavor, better known as the JCPOA (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action), faced two serious obstacles, one being the presidency of Donald Trump, who ignored almost every other international agreement between the U.S and the world—JCPOA being one of them—while the second obstacle came from hardliners in Iran who scorned the team's apparent naivety in believing what they saw as the US's false promises, and urged the Iranian state to also withdraw from the deal as an act of retaliation, which did not, however, happen. In this regard thus, the rise and fall of Oppenheimer as an expert in a specialized field of theoretical physics, and in being called upon in time of crisis could vaguely resemble the fate of the Iranian representatives involved in the nuclear talks to break the impasse of negotiations, in that both Oppenheimer and the Iranian team were subjected to false accusations despite achieving what they were required to do. A more detailed account of discussions around Iran's nuclear program will follow later in terms of being the backstory to the events dealt with in *All Alone.*

Geography Creating Narrative

To return to the context of the film, in general terms 'imposed sanctions' often foreground economic limitations in favor of political purposes, yet it is notable that using the lens of children reveals how other aspects of human life are impacted.

All Alone (2013) narrates a short period of Ranjero's life, a boy between 11-13, who is humorous, bright, and highly imaginative. He bonds with a younger Russian boy, Oleg, the son of an engineer working

[58] the first from 2010-2013, and the second from 2013-2015

in the Boushehr power plant, but their friendship is tested by the challenges arising from negotiations over Iran's nuclear program, which makes it difficult for Ranjero to befriend a foreign boy in the public eye, especially that of his scornful uncle who calls him a "communist" (apparently unaware that the communist Soviet bloc collapsed in the early nineties). Eventually, Oleg and his father leave Boushehr as a result of the suspension of nuclear activities there, and Ranjero escapes by hiding away in a ship bound for Italy in hopes to reach out to the UN headquarter in Geneva and seek the end of the suspension for the sake of his friendship with Oleg.

The nature of the children's relationship in this specific narrative and its connections to the politics around Iran's nuclear program are closely related to the setting of the events, which is a small village within close proximity of Boushehr's nuclear power plant. The plant was established before the 1979 revolution in Iran, though suspended due to the revolution and the Iraq-Iran war, but was then revived and rebuilt through a contract with Russian contractors in 1992 and was fully relaunched in 2007. The power plant created job opportunities for the youth and safeguarded the security of the province for the Russian contractors. However, the probing into Iran's nuclear program and the Security Council's resolutions between 2008 and 2011 raised huge tensions over probable military interventions if Iran failed to comply with international regulations concerning the transparency of its nuclear activities. It is no wonder that Ehsan Abdipour, as a local from that region, could successfully include these political complexities and specifically policies around nuclear activities, as enfolded in the lives of the people of Boushehr.

The Figure of the Child in Film and Iranian Cinema

Child-centered cinema has been a defining characteristic of early neorealist filmmaking from the outset. As Deborah Martin notes, these typical features include "a focus on the poor and working classes, a concern with social inequality, the use of natural actors and on-location shooting" (15).[59] This aligns with *All Alone*, as Ranjero and his friends have to work even as children to supplement the family income (though he does so in an apparently cheerfully entrepreneurial spirit rather than being depicted as a victim of poverty). Shooting the film on location in Boushehr puts this remote area of Iran and the struggles faced by the marginalized communities living there in the spotlight. And while the actor playing Ranjero was not an 'untrained' natural, many of the other children in the film are, contributing to a sense of authenticity. Martin notes that, "where filmmakers wish to denounce injustice or wrong, the child's gaze is particularly useful, since cinema 'tends to project into the child a certain ideal of visual neutrality' (Dufays qtd. in Martin, 2011)" (15). What is interesting in the case of *All Alone*, as I will explain, is that the film interjects three scenes from an adult perspective at strategic points in the cinematic narrative to unsettle the "visual neutrality."

In the Iranian context, as Moradabbasi Fouladi points out, child-centered cinema has been explored extensively in the post-revolution era, mainly through the films by internationally recognized directors such as Bahram Beizayi, Amir Naderi, Abbas Kiarostami, Majid Majidi and Jafar Panahi; however, Ehsan Abdipour belongs to a generation of filmmakers who had been the audience members of the preceding directors. Abdipour, born in 1981 in Boushehr, is essentially a story-teller and writer, whose stories focus on the culture and specifically the accent of the locals from Boushehr. Abdipour places an important emphasis on life stories and their recitation in oral performance. In his view, fiction and narrative are the ultimate achievement of human civilization, without which all else comes down to nothing. In an interview, he said: "the results of chemistry, physics, philosophy, everything can boil down to a story, where you and I are standing in a queue at a bus station and I voluntarily choose to send you ahead of me to take the next

[59] Martin draws on the films of Roberto Rossellini, Vittoria Da Sica and Francois Truffaut as examples.

bus. We need to capture and re-work life stories before they become too old and stale, before their actors die and take away their stories with them" (Instagram post, Garnet Talent 2023).

Child portrayal in imaginative works, such as written or screened narratives, is mainly drafted by adults and often shaped by expectations that children are innocent, immature, dependent and predictable, so that notions of childhood are devised by and in conformity with the social order of the adult world (see Owain Jones "I Was Born But…" and Angela Bushati "Children and Cinema…"). But the reality of children's identity stands largely outside these norms, in fact, as Jones claims, children are outlaws when it comes to movement and mobility or even the articulation and flow of their feelings (4). As will be discussed, Ranjerjo's "outlaw" status is suggested by the numerous tracking shots of him moving freely across the island either running or on his bicycle. Jones adds that, "compellingly, in having that natural agency, they become otherised in comparison to grownups in charge of them sometimes—yet in their very otherness, they become particularly sensitive ground in terms of ethics, politics, and power emanating from adultness" (25). Similarly, drawing on Hamid Reza Sadr 's (2002) comments about how depictions of children in the post-revolution cinema of Iran contribute to exposing lived social realities, Anne Patrick Major notes that, "children in Iranian post-revolutionary cinema function empathetically, and by relating to individuals in a way that bypasses national and social belongings, children become a device to produce intercultural meanings" (25). While this comment refers to the way the spectators empathize with the characters and are thus affectively drawn into the narrative, the "intercultural meaning" generated is also manifested by the way Oleg and Ranjero interact with one another despite language barriers. Patrick Major adds that "Sadr goes on to explain that children's 'personal troubles tend not to remain personal,' which implies their existence in the world anterior to a given film is more realistic" (25), and this is borne out by Ranjero's incarceration on the Italian ship. The perspectives outlined here by Sadr and Jones thus clarify how "children allow for humanistic empathy despite the presence of national or cultural signifiers that could produce political and ideological readings if inscribed upon an adult" (Patrick Major 25), which can then explain why the effects of nuclear sanctions in Iran are more compellingly presented via a child-centered narrative.

In this respect, the acclaimed Iranian film historian, Hamid Naficy, notes that children in Iranian cinema are represented "as social agents and meaning-makers who attempt to solve their problems on their own" while remaining open to notions such as "reconciliation, decency, compassion, optimism and hope" (qtd. in Moradabbasi 26). In the case of Ranjero, this is illustrated in his determined efforts to take matters into his own hands after the power plant has been shut down, as well as his relentless search for explanations and demands for accountability from those who seem to be complicit in separating him from Oleg when the Russians are forced to leave Boushehr. Furthermore, Amir Ali and Amir Hadi Nojoumian's analysis of Kiarostami's depiction of children in their "Towards a Poetics of Childhood in Abbas Kiarostami's Cinema" reveals an "understanding of ethics [...] that is not universal and does not offer an arrangement of moral principles, but a contextual and dialogical system in permanent endeavor to redefine itself" (197). In other words, these children, through their own specific paradigms, eventually arrive at new questions which can challenge standard ethics (as suggested by the questions Ranjero poses to his teacher in the second epigraph), or else propose creative resolutions resulting from their own lived perspective. Their chapter draws on Emmanuel Levinas' ideas on ethics presented in his *Totality and Infinity* (1979), wherein he questions the traditional Greek or European notions of ethics based on "ego as the self-conscious knowing subject." (Levinas qtd. in Nojoumian and Nojoumian 200). Instead, Levinas offers a perspective of an ethical system that puts under question the subject's own ego and as a result is essentially characterized by the other: "one is in a face-to-face relationship with the other, with infinite responsibility" (qtd. in Nojoumian and Nojoumian 200). Accordingly, the traditional notions of 'self,' which ultimately nurture an egotistical subject, are replaced by a concept in which the self is not only defined and dependent, but also

responsible for the other in their very recognition or being. Attempting to further clarify this responsibility, Amir Ali and Amir Hadi Nojoumian explain that children do not feel responsible towards the other out of reciprocity but essentially as "self's obligation" (200), which thus puts the other within one's self, and this will be extended to the relationship between the two boys who do not speak each other's language.

On the other hand, Fanon in his discussion of the interdependence of self and other quotes Hegel's *Phenomenology of Mind*: "Self-consciousness exists in itself and for itself, in that and by the fact that it exists for another self-consciousness; that is to say, it is only by being acknowledged or recognized" (216). It could be said that the very presence of children being involved in a narrative about a nuclear program, a topic entirely dominated by adults, marks them as the 'other' in the film, and the friendship between Oleg as an outsider and Ranjero as a local could also be reviewed from a postcolonial perspective since one of these children, Oleg, is twice othered for being a child and a foreigner. The moral self-obligation of the 'other' and exploring one's self through the 'other' are thus two notions which are interwoven throughout the narrative structure of *All Alone.*

Structuring *All Alone*

All Alone is structured by shifts between the apparently free-flowing childhood experiences of Ranjero in Boushehr, and three scenes which take place in the confined space of the Captain's cabin on the ship docked in Italy where Ranjero is being kept in custody as a stowaway. Splitting the interview between Olga, the Ukranian engineer working in Boushehr power plant, and the ship's Captain into three scenes that are placed at the beginning, middle and end of the film, provides the narrative structure to the film, in that each scene offers a frame and an (adult) context to the sequences that follow. At the same time, Olga serves as an intermediary between Ranjero's world and the institutional world of adults. On the one hand, she finds herself mediating between Ranjero and Oleg as she is able to translate for them both and becomes a reluctant confidante, and on the other hand, she tries to intercede on Ranjero's behalf when she travels to Italy in order to explain Ranjero's case and secure his release.

While the opening sequence of the film plunges us directly into the exuberant playfulness of Ranjero's world, the camera then cuts abruptly away to the first interview in the Captain's cabin. The juxtaposition between what we later realize is a dream encounter characterized by children's voices, color and action to the stasis of the monochrome formality of the Captain's office where Olga and the Captain face each other across his desk, establishes the contrast between seeing 'through' the lens of childhood, interspliced with adult interpretations of events. At the same time, it emerges that Ranjero's experiences are in fact the back story to the interview in the Captain's office. In the first of these sequences, she asks the Captain to exempt Ranjero from prosecution, because he is just a child. In the cut to the second sequence, half way through the film, Olga admits to deep involvement in Ranjero and Oleg's friendship. The last cut to their meeting at the end of the film works as a resolution or a denouement offered by the Captain, who argues that it is in Ranjero's own best interest to be delivered to the local police, as his temporary incarceration will make news headlines, both locally and internationally, and in this way Ranjero's voice will be heard, and his cause made public. At the same time this course of action would be in compliance with the Captain's own legal obligation to follow international regulations by handing over a stowaway.

As mentioned above, the film starts with one of Ranjero's dreams, where a group of boys are happily splashing about on the sea shore until unexpectedly, they see a strange flying object in the sky which they first mistake for an UFO, but later transforms into a fighter jet. Ranjero, as one of several teenagers in the water, heroically jumps up to the raised platform where a Shorad (Short Range Air Defense) is mounted, and eventually shoots down the jet fighter. The sequence of scenes, from the surreal dreams of Ranjero to his interactions with friends, co-workers, Oleg and adults, can be seen to exemplify children's capacity to appropriate adults' "ordered or controlled" (Jones 8) spaces through their own liberty of movement. As

noted, this freedom of mobility is also evident in Ranjero's daily routine as the camera alternates between medium and long-shot to follow him running to school, running to the dockside to collect the fish his father has caught, and cycling to the Russian sector to sell the fish. However, throughout the film this apparently perpetual movement is interrupted by moments which involve the camera tracking a passage through doorways, or focusing on doors being opened or closed which is often used to mark the shift between scenes. These doors signify the entry into another world and also mark the thresholds that Ranjero crosses to engage with new levels of awareness, which is in keeping with his liminal situation as pre-adolescent.

As described by Michael Carklin, the term "liminality," in relation to child portrayal, can refer to "circumstances and experiences of children that are profoundly life changing" (qtd. in Han and Singer 6), while also illustrating children's agency in "forging new positions and relationships within their community and not in isolation" (Han and Singer 6). For instance, Ranjero and Oleg first encounter one another in front of Oleg's house in the Russian sector, and when Oleg delays in returning Ranjero's fish-weighing contraption, Ranjero cautiously goes through the door which is ajar and enters their house uninvited, while the camera follows his gaze as he discovers a telescope and the mounted photos of astronauts (we discover later that Oleg's uncle is an astronaut). Ranjero is amazed that the houses he always passes by on his bike to sell fish contain some of his unattainable dreams. In this case the door of Oleg's house ushers an entry for Ranjero into a new world of possibilities.

Ranjero, in a second meeting with Oleg, talks about his waking dream encounter with aliens, which to him is not a dream but a reality that only he was lucky enough to witness; however, when he returns to the same spot where the encounter happened the previous day, all he finds is a sea turtle. Oleg's inability to understand Farsi, which is what Ranjero mainly speaks, sends them both to Olga. She, like the other engineers of the nuclear plant, lives in the same block, albeit behind locked doors and drawn curtains, which in her case, however, are indicative of her voluntarily seclusion within the neighborhood. Olga opens reluctantly to Ranjero, whom she knows as the fish seller, but in opening up her door to the two children, she is exposed to their spectacular world of dreams and desires, which eventually turns her into one of the pivotal characters in the film. With Olga's help, Ranjero succeeds in communicating his dream to Oleg, only to find out that he has heard similar stories and strongly urges Ranjero to look after the 'alien' turtle since its fellow aliens will certainly return to fetch it, and in return for Ranjero's service they will reward him by fulfilling one of his wishes.

At first sight, the friendship between Oleg and Ranjero seems odd since, apart from the language barrier, Oleg is considerably younger than Ranjero, and of a different class and nationality, but it becomes clear that they can communicate in a language beyond the spoken one. Ranjero, whose behavior can be impulsive, is adventurous and yet determined and has a lot to offer to Oleg, who is lonely and isolated, and due to his age and unfamiliarity with his new environment, much more vulnerable. In order to have their wishes granted by imaginary aliens, they create a house on the rocky shores for the alien turtle to stay in hopes that it will communicate with the aliens on their behalf. Owain Jones' comments about alternative spaces created by children are relevant here:

> What is undeniable is that they have to negotiate their spatial becoming-other within what is generally adult orientated space. The home, the neighborhood, the school, the city are obvious examples [...] Children's geographies have to trace through them as best they can, through mixings of subterfuge, subversion, or contestation [...]. Children live out their otherness, their 'other geography,' by appropriating spaces in a range of ways [...] under the noses (so to speak) of adults. (8)

But the sweet course of their friendship is disrupted soon by the result of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) reports, raising skepticism over the transparency of Iranian nuclear activities and the Russian contractors call all activities at Bushehr's nuclear plant to a halt. This causes a storm of anger

amongst the locals and one of the first targets becomes Ranjero and Oleg's relationship. Once more, with Olga's help, Ranjero explains everything to Oleg, but at the same time speaks on behalf of his local community: "It is not fair to sign the contract and not fulfill your commitments when other dogs [other dogs being the opponent countries] start barking" (41:29-39). Ranjero's own commitment to his friendship is seen in his message to Oleg explaining why he must pretend to ignore him for a few days in the public eye, yet his comment about the interrupted contract is induced by the rage of the locals, which is one of the several examples that put Ranjero in an 'in-between' or liminal role shifting between child and adult worlds. On the one hand, Ranjero's message for Oleg aligns with Sadr's comment that children's problems tend not to remain personal, as we see how his relationship is over-shadowed by circumstances in the adult world and more importantly how Ranjero as a young pre-adolescent links his anger at being potentially separated from Oleg to the nuclear talks and sanctions. On the other hand, on this occasion, we are exposed to Oleg's otherization, both as a child, on a par with Ranjero, and doubly as a foreign child in a new geographic and cultural environment. Oleg, as a younger boy with barely any friends other than Ranjero, is shocked by the circumstances of having to stay away from his friend, and further having to bear the disdainful looks of the locals, the source of which he can hardly understand. This is perhaps why that same night he briefly shows up at his father's bedroom door and says: "Dad? Could you please be nicer to Ranjero and the people of the village?" which, as reflected in the expression on his father's face, is received by a flood of mixed feelings, as the father is puzzled by how Oleg knows about the sanctions, and why he is standing up for the hostile locals. Oleg's short but intense communication with his father is just another example that children's apparently 'small world' issues can very well extend to and complicate adult world dynamics.

A few days later, Oleg approaches the boys working at the harbor with a newspaper in hand, and after Ranjero reads the headlines, he starts scorning the ignorance of his fellow workers: "It has nothing to do with Russia, it is the Atomic Energy Agency, I bet you have never heard of an Atom owning an Agency" (45:15-21), and safely resumes his relationship with Oleg. Reunited at Olga's house, the friends mutually affirm their bond. But for the first time Ranjero asks what Oleg's wish would be once the aliens return, and Olga and Ranjero then learn about the predicament of Oleg's mother, who has been institutionalized in a mental health facility, and all Oleg wishes is for his mother to recover and return home. In the second meeting sequence between Olga and the Captain, Olga reflects on how deeply she soon became entangled in the boys' friendship. Not only is she exposed to the disclosure of some of their deepest secrets, but her mediating role in the communication between them also extends to her, as it were, transmitting their deepest desires to the audience. In addition, one could argue that she serves as a witness to the children's otherness since, as noted by Owain Jones in his "'I Was Born But…': Children as Other / Nonrepresentational Subjects in Emotional and Affective Registers as Depicted in Film": "There is a triangulation between the child subject, the camera and the viewer. The camera shows the child from the outside, not getting in the head completely (like a first-person narrative) but offering careful, imaginative, empathetic, witnessing of the child in space and in narrative" (8-9).[60] One could thus say that the role of the viewer can at times extend to Olga as well since Olga as a mature adult, is also to some extent an outsider (like the spectators) to the events that she both experiences and witnesses. In her role as interpreting the events of Ranjero's life to the Captain, we too are being informed, yet as mentioned earlier by Sadr, because of the affective identification with the child protagonist in child-centered cinema,

[60] Owain Jones draws on concepts raised by Vicky Lebeau in *Childhood and Cinema* (2008): "Lebeau goes on to suggest that if language has limits in representing the otherness of the child, film has some purchase, and can become 'closer to the child' because of its 'privileged access to the perceptual, its visual and aural richness" (7)

the viewer responds empathetically (like, or via Olga) to the "intercultural meanings" (qtd. in Patrick-Major 25) of the worldview of Ranjero and Oleg.

The reunion of friends is short-lived, as the tensions around Iran's nuclear program escalate to the UN, and the nuclear power plant of Boushehr has to shut down, the sad result of which is that Oleg and his father leave Iran for an indefinite period. Ranjero follows the news with a mixture of fear and vehement distress. For instance, meeting his literature teacher, Mr. Najafpour, he has questions to ask about the unfamiliar terms he has encountered in media reports about the nuclear talks, such as, "moral scandal, unilateral sanctions, political lobby, Iranian proposal, high-ranking official, missile defense system" (1:03:05-13), the raising of which surprises his teacher, and signifies the level of Ranjero's engagement with the terminology of foreign policy and international relations. The film does not engage with Mr. Najafpour's reply to these questions, implying that the intricacies of the events happening behind the scenes were also difficult for him as an adult to explain. However, these very questions preoccupied the minds of many Iranians whose prospect of a normal life, like Ranjero's friendship, was bound by the results of the nuclear talks at the time. A brief review of the measures taken by the first negotiating team seems pertinent here as it can address the complexity of the situation, which Najafpour, or the film, apparently keep silent about. The first negotiating team,[61] headed by then secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council, approached the international talks about Iran's nuclear program from an ethical perspective and a position of power—on their own terms—in short, they admitted to Iran's high capacity for uranium enrichment, but they also emphasized Iran's commitment to the NPT (Non-proliferation Treaty) as an ethical deterrent against developing a nuclear bomb.[62] However, given that Iran's capacity for uranium enrichment was a source of anxiety for the international community as a potential threat, they were ready to compromise on the issue of transparency and the new limits of nuclear activity in return for a range of issues at hand, from the revoking of the UN resolutions, the lifting of the American and EU sanctions, to allowing Iran to interfere or participate in regional conflicts in the interests of global peace.[63] The implication of such steps, as Ali Fathollahi-Nejad (*The Islamic Republic….*) suggests, could be seen as follows: "Tehran feels, that if it can accumulate leverage by markedly stepping up its nuclear program, it can then enter into negotiations with Washington from a position of strength and not weakness" (56), which clarifies the highly idealistic objectives of the first negotiating team before reaching a deal.[64]

Ranjero's questions about nuclear talks can address a range of concepts in relation to the review of the events discussed above from a child's perspective, for instance, Be´la Ba´lzas (2010) makes a connection between a child's point of view and "secret corners" (qtd. in Han and Singer 6) that are exposed so that the often unseen can become visible, or open to question by being seen through the eyes of a

[61] The brief insertion comes from an extensive Q & A session held in the Clubhouse (app) in August 2023, which was an oral account of the book *The Sealed Secret* (2021) by Javad Zarif, former foreign minister of Iran, explaining the ambiguities around the first and second round of talks on Iran's nuclear program.

[62] A first powerful imperative for the Islamic Republic to ever attain any means of mass destruction, such as an atomic bomb, was definitely the Supreme Leader's religious fatwa against deviation of the nuclear program to develop a nuclear bomb.

[63] In more clear terms, the former foreign minister, Javad Zarif, describes the efforts of the first negotiating team as idealistic, or aiming for high objectives in hopes to gain the least out of them, and the result was indeed an impasse since making any demands by Iran, in that round of talks, was unrealistic in the framework of international relations, in other words, the talks aimed at certain demands from Iran to be fulfilled.

[64] Fatholahi-Nejad applies the same logic to the designation of Iran's foreign policy in the aftermath of the U.S unilateral withdrawal from JCPOA in 2018, but it arguably puts Iran in a different position, considering the aftermath of reaching a deal and Iran's mitigation of enrichment as intended by and in an international agreement.

child. Geta Leseur (1995) describes the child's viewpoint in a most delicate, but poignant metaphor as a "forgotten camera in the corner" (qtd. in Flockemann 117), whose presence may not be felt but fulfills its function to observe and record and in the process, thereby, offering an 'unconscious' critique of the adult world (Flockemann 117). In fact, Najafpour's astonishment in the face of Ranjero's questions comes from having to acknowledge the existence of an inquisitive eye which demands answers. In a much broader sense, Negar Mottahedeh (*Iranian Studies*) draws on Sadr to offer readings of the child figure specifically in Iranian cinematography as an allegory of the restrictions faced by the film industry as follows: "The child can embody spatial positions and emotional states that other filmic characters cannot. The figure of the child, then, allegorically foregrounds the constraints of the film industry under state-guided dictates" (342). The silence of Najapour, or implicitly the film, reveals the difficulty of ever being able to make a public critique or question what was being negotiated during the first round of nuclear talks, yet the figure of a curious child may open the way to begin to question such 'unspoken' aspects.[65]

Ranjero learns about the failure of the first round of talks from the border guards. In despair, he goes back to the turtle and waits for the aliens to return, and through Olga he sends a message to Oleg: "if they [aliens] show up, I will only ask for your wish, nothing else" (1:10:37-42), which is a profound moment of 'self-obligation' and not reciprocity on the part of Ranjero as described earlier by Amir Ali and Amir Hadi Nojoumian. Recognizing Oleg's source of distress in their reconciliation at Olga's, Ranjero now focuses on Oleg alone, in other words, he becomes one with him and discovers "the other in oneself" (Nojoumian and Nojoumian 200). Olga's return message from Oleg: "If they do not return in three weeks, they will not come to fetch their fellow" (1:17:56-1:18:09), is the last straw for Ranjero and prompts his outlandish secret plan to travel to the UN to intercede on Oleg's behalf with a letter in hand translated by Olga. In the final cut to the meeting between Olga and the Captain, she once again urges the Captain to overlook Ranjero's childish mistake and let him return with her, to which the Captain responds: "The best you and I could do for him is to turn him in to the police to be returned to his hometown in the custody of the Iranian Embassy's after ten days. But in those ten days he will make headlines about his trip, and many more reporters will write about a boy who travelled from Boushehr to speak for his people, it is the only way we can help his voice to be heard" (1:26:58-1:27:20).

While the Captain argues that this will ensure that Ranjero's cause thus receives public attention, it also means that the Captain remains within the law in reporting a stowaway.

Conclusions

While the prevalence of Ranjero's moving across thresholds into new worlds of experience and understanding was discussed earlier, in the last section of the film, it is characterized by scenes demonstrating Ranjero's situation as a liminal figure. In addition, the ethical potentialities of this situation as suggested in the portrayal of liminal spaces and liminality in broader terms are also demonstrated. We are introduced to his sense of apparently fearless commitment from the outset via Ranjero's first dream at the opening of the movie, yet, as a result of the tensions around the nuclear program in the second half of the film, culminating in the third cut with the conversation between Olga and the Captain, we observe Ranjero's distress as he finds himself caught between his friendship with Oleg which depends on the media reports about the nuclear talks on the one hand, and the needs of his own family and community on the other. This is cinematically represented in terms of the various thresholds he opts to pass through. The first phase is after Oleg's departure when Ranjero desperately follows the news in hopes of a sign of

[65] As evident in the title of Javad Zarif's book, published over a decade after the first round of talks, namely *The Sealed Secret.*

Oleg's return, but when the negotiations reach an impasse, a disheartened Ranjero tears the collection of newspapers he has been following into pieces, and retreats to his childish dream about the return of the aliens who will grant his wishes. But eventually with a helping hand offered from his friends, he decides to attempt his secret mission to the UN one last time.

These emotional shifts and the shuffling between phases and roles parallel the rhythm of Ranjero's life with that commonly associated with childhood as mentioned earlier: "Children are also, generally, more emotionally mobile. Fear, anger, tears, joy are states younger children move through often on hourly basis" (Jones 4). In deciding to secretly board the ship with his friends' help, he openly says farewell to his family. When his father asks: "But why the UN my son?" (1:23:56), we see a close-up of Ranjero's face talking to the camera: "there are secrets that I only carry in my heart" (1:23:57-40), and with that sentence he approaches the doorway around which his family have clustered anxiously and passes through them effortlessly, followed by a close-up of his father following him with his eyes in both bafflement and admiration. Ranjero's imprisonment on board after being discovered again suggests his liminal status because he is caught in-between a point of departure and a destination, which highlights, despite his determination, his liminal or in-between status.

The Captain's proposal to help Ranjero's voice be heard by the world referred to earlier needs to be considered in light of a crucial question posed by Kallio: "how can children's voice be heard without recruiting, banalising or homogenizing them?" (qtd. in Jones 6). This is cinematically captured in the voice-over in Ranjero's last letter to his Farsi Literature teacher: "In my recent dreams I cry out loud for Heleylah and its people, I remember how peaceful it once was. Dear Mr. Najafpour, is there a job in the world to turn one's nightmares into sweet dreams?" (1:27:43-52). Ranjero then describes his final future career choice. Since having become disillusioned with his former dreams of the white coat of the physician, the pilot's uniform, or the engineer's Samsonite briefcase, he now sees himself running a coffee stand on the corner of the street where the UN is located. It is clear that making money is not his prime objective, as he offers all his drinks at a low price; instead, he opts for meeting and talking to the highest political officials of each country, to engage in discussions over their current policies. The letter ends in an impassioned, direct address to his own president:

> If he [the president] runs bare foot like us in hot summer noon to bring ice from the Vaziri ice factory, if the president comes under the coffin, to carry with us, the bodies found of the soldiers who fought a war for this country some thirty years ago, then he will defuel all the jet fighters at night before going to bed… If the president listens to all I say carefully, it is impossible that he returns to the UN building when his Ranginak [a local drink] is finished. Instead, he will ask for a lighter, light a cigarette and will walk down the path that he came from. And I will fall asleep on the sidewalk of the very street that UN is located in, I will sleep so peacefully to make up for all the years that I have been denied of a good night's sleep. (1:29:46-1:31:10)

This direct address reveals the potential efficacy of the child's perspective to infiltrate the vaster domain of the hidden or forbidden questions of accountability, a move not possible to the adult, especially given the censorship laws in Iran, but the film demonstrates that it is perfectly possible for the apparently naïve (but differently ethical) child to refer to the 'unspoken.'

Ranjero's letter to the president loops back to the two epigraphs at the beginning of the article, in that one could say there is a Ranjero visible in Oppenheimer's description of his life as a young student in Europe in the first epigraph: "I was homesick, emotionally immature, troubled by the visions of a hidden universe" (*Oppenheimer*, 3:32-45). Like the young Oppenheimer, Ranjero is stuck on a ship, homesick, crying aloud in his sleep for Heleylah, his hometown. Ranjero, similar to Oppenheimer in his early youth, is emotionally immature and is troubled by the visions of a "hidden universe" he had thought he could

understand. In other words, there is something troublesome for both Ranjero and Oppenheimer, and that is the angst of the manifestations of what is yet to become of the world, a pre-occupation with an adult world for Ranjero that constitutes "nightmares." Yet, in their more or less similar situations, one should keep in mind that Oppenheimer's description of his youth is self-reflective, only taking place in hindsight when he is well into adulthood, in other words, his adult self is well-placed to look back and understand the perplexities of his younger self. However, in the case of Ranjero, he is still a pre-adolescent child located in the doorway to adulthood, forced to pass through that threshold to become the adult that life requires him to be. As a result, while on the doorstep to becoming an adult, he still has questions as a child. As Angela Vacche puts it, "by returning to the ground zero of childhood through the nonjudgemental vision of the camera eye, the cinema can engender fresh emotions, while it can also open us up to existential discoveries, ranging from curiosity towards otherness to acceptance of difference" (5). At the end of the film we are left with an unanswered question, namely, will Ranjero find a way to negotiate between the nightmares he envisions for the future and the sweet dreams he hopes for? The open-ended conclusion is deliberately unsettling because of how Ranjero's question, posed as a child, offers a challenge to the viewer.

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Authors:

Elham HOSSEINI, is PhD candidate of Cultural Studies at the University of Western Cape (South Africa), Arts and Humanities Faculty, English Department since 2019. Her PhD thesis, work in progress, is comparing the transitional periods in South Africa and Iran through dramatic literature and cinematic features. The objective defined and devised for this dissertation is to provide further insight into the ongoing and future transitional processes in both South Africa and Iran. Her research interests range from English Literature to World Literature, Film studies, and socio-political implications of cultural productions.
Contact: elhamhosseini2604@gmail.com, 3900113@myuwc.ac.za

Miki FLOCKEMANN is Extraordinary Professor in the Department of English at the University of the Western Cape, South Africa. Her most recent publications are: "Performing/Mourning Marikana as Affective Critique of a Nation in Crisis." (*Theatre, Performance and Commemoration*: *Staging Crisis, Memory and Nationhood*, edited by Miriam Haughton, Alinne Fernandes and Pieter Verstraete. Methuen Drama/Bloomsbury Press, 2023, pp. 149-142); "Antigone's Return: When a Once-told Story is Not Enough." (*English in Africa: Special Issue: Reading the Classics in South Africa*, Vol. 49, No. 3, November 2022, pp. 55-72); "Affect, Performance and Language: Implications for an Embodied and Interventionist Pedagogy." (*Languages and Literacies in Higher Education: Reclaiming Voices from the South,* edited by Zannie Bock and Christopher Stroud, Bloomsbury Press, 2021, pp. 67-84); "'Connecting Mind to Pen, to Eyes, to Face, to Arms and Legs': Towards a Performative and Decolonial Teaching Practice." (*Special Issue: Literature, Pedagogy, Confronting Colonialism: Cambridge Journal of Postcolonial Literary Enquiry,* edited by Neil ten Kortenaar, Cambridge University Press, 2020, pp. 286-296). She is currently working on a comparative study of the aesthetics of transition in South African theatre and fiction. Besides the works above mentioned, her research interests and publications include comparative studies of diasporic writings from South Africa, the Americas and the Caribbean with an emphasis on migrant experiences. She has also published extensively on contemporary South African theatre trends with a recent emphasis on the transformative potentiality of affective performance aesthetics.
Contact: mflockemann@uwc.ac.za , robmiki@mweb.co.za

Monica Manolachi
University of Bucharest

Book Review: A New Lease of Life for an Old Construction Myth

Book Reviewed:
Thomas J. Cousineau: *The Séance of Reading: Uncanny Designs in Modernist Writing*. Editura Universitară, Bucharest, 2023, 168 pp. ISBN 978-606-28-1592-9.

One of the fundamental and most famous Romanian legends, with variants in other Balkan cultures, "The Legend of Master Manole" has been interpreted as a disturbing allegory of creativity based on the myth of the founder's sacrifice. Tasked by the king with building the monastery of Curtea de Argeș, Master Manole and his team soon find out that whatever they build during the day collapses at night. In one of Master Manole's dreams, he is told that, only by encasing in the walls the first woman visiting them next morning, will they be able to build the monastery. He is eventually forced to sacrifice his pregnant wife Ana and thus the beautiful monastery is completed. When the masons boast in front of the king that they can build an even greater monastery, he has them stranded on the roof. Trying to escape, they all fall to the ground. The place of Manole's fall is marked by a well of clear water in the yard of the monastery. In Mircea Eliade's interpretation of the myth—from *Commentaires sur la légende de maître Manole*—Ana does not die, but she is transformed, as her "fleshly body" turns into an "architectural body" (15), a metamorphosis that is rather "camouflaged" (16), hence the need for literary and cultural analysis of the text that envelops the protagonists.

The Séance of Reading: Uncanny Designs in Modernist Writing by Thomas J. Cousineau is the second volume of a three-book project entitled The Manole Trilogy, preceded by *Ritual Unbound: Reading Sacrifice in Modernist Writing* (University of Delaware Press, 2004) and followed by *To Double-Business Bound: The Symmetrical Imperative of Writing* (work in progress). The American critic takes over Eliade's perspective to explore nine "literary monuments" of Western modernism and identify various artistic transformations based on what he calls the Manole complex, "thinking of them for the first time as disguised stagings of archaic building rituals" (17). The "Introduction" includes a shorter commentary of two works by Austrian writer Thomas Bernhard, *Correction* and *The Loser*, which the author previously examined in another book entitled *Three-Part Inventions*, but which are here reinterpreted.

In Chapter 1, the critic covers *The Great Gatsby* by F. Scott Fitzgerald, explaining that the main character's profile "has been chosen to serve as the victim whose sacrifice—reenacting the archaic building ritual inscribed in the Manole legend—will allow Fitzgerald to construct his most famous novel" (31). Jay Gatsby's wish "to fix everything just the way it was before" changes from the protagonist's "self-fixing" into the narrator's "posthumous fixing" (31). Nick Carraway seems to act as Gatsby's ghostwriter, amplifying his subjectivity and fictional context, while Fitzgerald, inspired by Keats's "sensuous imagery" (38), Shelley's "shattered visage" (40) from the sonnet "Ozymandias" or Conrad's "essentially heroic figure" (41) from *The Heart of Darkness*, turns an individual's past into a literary past.

Chapter 2 deals with James Joyce's first short story ever published, "The Sisters," which chronicles the relationship between a boy and a young priest. Cousineau points out that the corruption of Father Flynn and his untimely demise go in parallel with the construction of the story, concluding that "the mirroring

of the narrative elements creates an effect of aesthetic 'stasis'" (49). Considering the tragicomic circumstances in which the priest dies, the transfer of scrupulosity from the character's religious service to the narrator's storytelling skills and the author's writing act, and the more modernist second version of the story in comparison with its more romantic first version, the critic explains the immuring technique of the real corpse into the fictional body of the literary structure.

Dedicated to *The Book of Disquiet* by Portuguese writer Fernando Pessoa, Chapter 3 shows "the uncanny way in which the 'mortal body' of *Lisbon: What Every Tourist Should See*—the guidebook in which a self-styled cicerone provides visitors with a tour of Pessoa's native city—passes into the 'architectural body' of Pessoa's literary monument" (59). Dwelling on the categories of beauty and sublime, the critic maps the incorporation of pragmatically described great public edifices, monuments, streets, squares, ruins, royal figures, military figures, maritime history and paintings of Lisbon into the abyssal textual fabric of Pessoa's autobiographical lifetime project. Bernardo Soares, Pessoa's heteronym and the supposed author of *The Book of Disquiet*, acts as an imaginary artist that turns Pessoa's Lisbon into a literary work described as an "impressionist painting" (71).

In Chapter 4 and Chapter 6, Cousineau tackles two plays by Samuel Beckett: *Waiting for Godot* and *Endgame.* In the former, he explores the role of stage movements, the "actors' pauses, which transform Didi and Gogo's mortal act of waiting for Godot into the architectural body of *Waiting for Godot* itself" (77), and the ways in which the Irish playwright revisits choral odes to "transform them from sacred lamentations into theatrical routines" (84) through a series of stylistic techniques like repetitions, free associations, rhyme, synonyms and doublets. In the latter, the focus is on how the "war-like interdependence" (104) between Hamm and his servant Clov, seen as chess pieces, becomes "the cantata-like interdependence" (104) and on how the verbal and the physical forms of violence between them contribute to the architecture of the play, imagined as the end of a chess game and during the course of which Hamm's mother dies, to underscore the sacrifice.

Chapter 5, the only one that approaches poetry, centers on "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock" by T. S. Eliot, "a poem that transforms the personal predicament of 'the man who suffers' into the poetic technique of 'the mind that creates'" (90). The critic highlights that the poem encapsulates both the poet's aestheticized failures (personal past) and various intertextualities linked to the Bible and the works of Dante, John Donne, Baudelaire, Laforgue and Dostoevsky (literary past), a technique which is meant to infuse it with a sense of immortality.

In Chapter 7, Cousineau proposes a new reading of *A Short History of Decay* by Emil Cioran as a metamorphosis of his previous work, *Transfiguration de la Roumanie*: while both books convey "Cioran's longing for transfiguration," his earlier work is more explicit, more specific and refers to Romanians, while his later work is more implicit, more abstract and refers to humanity in general. Drawing on various exegeses, the critic demonstrates that what initially seems a prophetic and abusing subjectivity on the brink of committing suicide serves, in fact, as a dramatized self-transfiguration and a form of speculative thinking, which is also visible in the use of French instead of Romanian, of certain keywords and of poetic language.

The only section that focuses on a woman writer's work is Chapter 8. The critic studies Flannery O'Connor's short story entitled "A Good Man is Hard to Find" and shows how "being misfit" gains new meanings from the perspective of the Manole complex: the convict who calls himself The Misfit escapes from the penitentiary where he was "buried alive" (134) for a crime he did not commit; the American author "buries him alive" (134) in the short story, forcing him to commit several murders, using a narrative technique called "aesthetics of incongruity" (133) and a series of other artistic burials such as intertextualities.

Drawing on previous views, Chapter 9 examines several meanings of "framing" in *Light of August* by William Faulkner through the lens of sacrificial rituals. Cousineau argues that "Faulkner uses framing *both* as an instrument of accusation *and* as an aesthetic technique" (146). On the one hand, the community unjustly frames certain characters as guilty, sometimes with comic effects, which reflects the novelist's ethical intentions. On the other hand, he frames the narrative in a series of triptychs, so as to mirror his aesthetic intentions and the simultaneity of the dynamic and the static structures of his novel.

In a global world, where cultures become more and more interdependent, Thomas J. Cousineau argues for the assimilation of a regional myth into the wider domain of world literature and criticism by proposing the Manole complex as an interpretive lens similar to the Oedipus complex and as an ordering principle of fundamental modernist works. Through the practice of close reading and the identification of various aesthetic modes of transforming the subject matter, he explains how its uncanny design based on the sacrifice of an Other for the construction of Something, with its series of discontinuities and arresting unexpected effects, may be relevant for a better understanding of literary creativity and ethical engagement.

Author:
Monica MANOLACHI is a lecturer in the Department of Modern Languages, Faculty of Foreign Languages and Literatures, University of Bucharest. Her research interests are contemporary anglophone literature, postcolonial and cultural studies, poetry studies and Romanian literature in translation. *Performative Identities in Contemporary Caribbean British Poetry* (Ars Docendi, 2017) is part of her work as a researcher and literary critic. Her most recent published articles are "The Image of the Danube in Contemporary Novels Associated with Hungarian Culture" (*Cultural Intertexts, 2023*) and "Studying Arabic in Egypt: Identity Issues in Two Travel Memoirs by Daniela Firănescu and Oana Păun" (*Paradigms of Pilgrimage: From Devotional Journey To (Religious) Tourism/ Paradigmes Du Pèlerinage: Du Voyage Dévotionnel Au Tourisme (Religieux*), 2023). She is also a poet, literary translator and editor.

Contact: monica.manolachi@lls.unibuc.ro

Jaime Segura San Miguel
Universidad Complutense de Madrid

Book Review: José Manuel Losada, *Mitocrítica cultural. Una definición del mito*. Ediciones Akal, 2022

Reviewed work: José Manuel Losada: *Mitocrítica cultural. Una definición del mito*. Madrid: Ediciones Akal, 2022. pp. 828. 35,00€. ISBN: 978-84-460-5267-8

Few concepts can lay claim to possessing the attributes of cultural universality, historical transcendence, and enduring social relevance to the same degree as myths. Myths have served as explanations for phenomena that have eluded scientific inquiry since times immemorial, giving rise to the classical—albeit contentious—dichotomy between mythos and logos. Although some classical thinkers, such as Aristotle, contended that mythological and philosophical thinking shared similar purposes and that the former might indeed be the progenitor of the latter, this division soon engendered a problematic conceptualization. Throughout history, particularly with the ascendancy of Positivism, there has been a prevailing tendency to marginalize mythological thought as 'inferior,' while elevating positivistic thought and equating it to rationality, thereby implying that rationality exclusively resides within the framework of empiricism. As English scholar John Burnet[66] posited, authentic philosophy was characterized by scientific and rational deliberation, and it was from this perspective that myth's irrationality and lack of scientific rigor were deduced, ultimately leading to the conclusion, especially in the era of Positivism, that mythological thought may be unworthy of serious academic pursuit. Furthermore, the term “myth” has historically assumed a wide array of distinct meanings, a circumstance that, at times, has obstructed the cohesive theoretical development of a field of study which has often necessitated a more favorable appraisal. Beyond the varying definitions offered by mythographers, theologians, and scholars of mythology, the semantically expansive connotation of “myth” in our postmodern society has been employed to define a plethora of phenomena, ranging from famous objects, like James Bond’s cars; through pivotal historical moments and even celebrity figures raised to the status of myth, like Marilyn Monroe or Ernesto “Che” Guevara.

In his book, José Manuel Losada tackles both of these persistent issues, with a particular emphasis on the latter. While it is worth acknowledging the prevailing dismissive attitude towards myth and religion in our contemporary postmodern society, a deeper examination reveals the diminishing persuasiveness of Positivism. This becomes evident when we delve into the inherently exclusionary relationship between science, reason, and Positivism, which depends on the unquestioning acceptance of Positivist principles. In simpler terms, by challenging the notion that Positivism is the exclusive path to truth, science, and reason, we lay the groundwork for a more inclusive perspective where scholars can recognize the possibility, and even the necessity, of both approaches coexisting harmoniously. However, adopting this humanistic perspective does not entirely remove one significant obstacle on the path to establishing a unified theory in the realm of myth criticism. Losada's approach, known as Cultural Myth Criticism, lays

[66] See *Early Greek Philosophy*, by John Burnet. London and Edinburgh: A. and C. Black ltd. 1892

the foundation for the examination of myths in our contemporary, postmodern society. It offers a more precise and constrained definition of myth, avoiding the dangers of falling into symbolic idealism and the temptation to defend the mythological nature of nearly any narrative.

The age-old ontological problem of understanding myths has been a subject of interest for generations, drawing the attention of inquisitive minds across history. In the twentieth century, scholars have theorized a variety of definitions, along with the characteristics that stem from their typologies, to make sense of myths. These definitions, however, have often been used as tools for academics who, far from studying myths themselves, used them to dissect and critique aspects of society, culture, or the human psyche. In everyday conversation, as well, the term "myth" keeps expanding its boundaries, accommodating new meanings as times change. This natural evolution is not as much of an issue—the chasm between informal use of terms and scientific jargon has always existed and seldom has it affected academic use—as the existence of multiple academic classifications of "myth," as posited by notable thinkers. The issue of definitions hypothesized by thinkers like Durand, Levi-Strauss, and Malinowski set aside, Losada suggests a definition which stems from approaching the issue from typology to definition, instead.

This approach requires some preliminary considerations to be laid down. The first section of the book, which comprehends chapters one and two—preface and context—directs our attention to a few factors that affect the nature and reception of myths in a postmodern world. First, globalization blurs the boundaries of myth inasmuch as it exists confined to a specific culture, making it harder to pin down its essence, since it leads to the creation of a global folklore where myths struggle to retain cultural specificity. Second, the postmodern relativistic doxa challenges myths by undermining the incontrovertible frames of thought and the universal principles that myths are related to. Myths relate to and speak of objective truths, and they are associated to objective values: researchers will, therefore, need to avoid seeking a certain truth about another culture—less influenced by relativism and possessing of more objective values—through our postmodern lens. Lastly, the logic of immanence, with its preference for empiricist perspectives and the modern fixation with individual autonomy, also shapes our perception of myths. Losada defines the logic of immanence as “dynamic collection of both normative and practical concepts and judgements stemming from our thinking about the entities who phenomenologically circumscribe our experiential perception of the world” (88). This modernist taste for total autonomy has led to an abandonment of questions that formerly held a higher relevance in the field of humanities, and which often require for the researcher to humbly accept their ontological limitations and be open to mystery (687).

With these critical considerations in mind, Losada starts the second section of the book by suggesting a new definition of myth with the objective of unifying the theoretical landscape within the field. This redefined notion seeks to prevent the pervasive and imprecise use of the term while providing Cultural Myth Criticism with a rigorous scientific methodology that rejects empirical constraints and, in turn, permits the comprehensive study of myth in a coherent manner, free from being merely a crutch for other disciplines like anthropology or psychoanalysis. According to Losada's theory, a myth, within the context of Cultural Myth Criticism, is a functional, symbolic and thematic narrative of one or several extraordinary events with a transcendent, sacred and supernatural referent; which lacks, in principle, historical testimony; and which refers to an individual or collective, but always absolute, cosmogony or eschatology (193).

The inclusion of these transcendent elements and references to cosmogonies or eschatologies as *conditio sine qua non* serves to clarify the definition and deter its spurious use or undue subjection to other fields of study. Nonetheless, even though this definition represents the culmination of a long academic career dedicated to the study of myths, it would be of limited help without the provision of

additional guidance and considerations for its application. To this end, *Mitocrítica cultural. Una definición del mito* proceeds to elaborate a detailed explanation of the defining characteristics of myth in the following chapters, with a typology ranging from the functions, symbols, and thematic elements inherent to myths, to the nature of their structure.

In the third chapter, José Manuel Losada delves into the narrative dimension of myth, which presents an autonomous narrative structure (198), and develops a mythopoetic of forms and contents. By making reference to the three main Aristotelian genres, epic, drama, and lyric, Losada cements his analytical model further with the explanations required to understand how myth relates to time, both transcendent and immanent, or to dreams. This incidence on time is key for Losada's definition of myth, since it can only occur when the transcendent world touches the immanent one. In this case, absolute times—those whose referent are absolute cosmogonies or eschatologies—must co-exist with the natural time in the narration (250).

In the fourth chapter, the referential function of myth is explained, and it contemplates two possible types: immanent and transcendent categoric references, depending on whether they refer to this world or to the other world (279). Likewise, the book explores how myth can have teleological or didactic functions, to help the myth criticism researcher delve into the origins or the objectives of myths. This is followed by a fifth chapter, which lays down the considerations one must have in regards to the association between myths, images, and symbols. Here, the author carefully dissects the differences between myths, archetypes, symbols, and images with the intention of better delineating the boundaries of his definition of myth and thus prevent any infelicity of use, an aspect which is one of the main drivers behind the intellectual enterprise and intention of the book.

The sixth chapter further develops these boundaries by examining how archetypal or symbolic characters differ from mythical ones, continuing the terminological delimitation through the exploration of the prosopomyth and its opposition to the merely "mythicised" popular characters in society. Again, the transcendent dimension is the most defining characteristic that allows an aspiring researcher following these tenets to identify the myth.

Possible extraordinary events, namely metamorphoses, prophecies or omens, and the use of magic are expounded in the following chapter, thus illustrating how the irruption of the transcendent world into the natural one marks the mythical occurrence, which often has a foundation in the numinous. While mythification and demythification are dealt with in the eighth chapter, to better understand Losada's definition of myth and to provide a clearer border to avoid incorrect uses of terminology. Here, he distinguishes between pseudo-mythicised historical characters, who have become legendary but lack the rest of the necessary aspects of myth, and those who, on the other hand, become de-mythicised, a very common occurrence in modern cinema and literature due to the revisitation of cultural references that have now, in their current representations, lost all reference to absolute times or transcendence.

The ninth chapter delves into the structure of myth, and elaborates on the differences between myth, theme and mytheme. This analysis, which is partly inspired by Claude-Levi Strauss's structuralist approach, helps us understand the evolution of classical myths and mythemes into their modern representations, often afflicted by processes of modification, inversion, or suppression. According to Losada's framework, these lead to distortion, subversion, and extinction of myths, respectively.

The last two sections deal with the relationship between myths and cosmogonies and eschatologies. These two are essential since Losada's definition strictly requires reference to absolute times, whether individual or collective, and the origins and destinies of either humankind or those mythological characters in the narration. The former of these references comprehends in this thorough examination the cases of cosmogony, theogony, and anthropogony, while the latter deal with the eternal recurrence, mythical regenerations or resurrections, and the theme of immortality.

Finally, the book contains at the end a vast and comprehensive bibliography, along with four different indices—mythological, analytical, onomastic, and of works—that make this volume a useful and accessible research and referential tool for both new and established researchers alike.

Jose Manuel Losada's *Mitocritica cultura. Una definición del mito* stands as a formidable scholarly contribution in the realm of myth criticism and it comprehensively fulfils the book's objectives of providing a new definition—along with its dimensions of study—while offering an engaging and sophisticated perspective on the nature of myth. This work not only enhances academic knowledge by presenting a philosophical and essayistic analysis of myth but also embarks on an encyclopedic and critical exploration of the historical development of myth studies, along with a plethora of examples that illustrate and facilitate a deeper understanding of Losada's definition. Myth, usually used erroneously in day-to-day conversation, and often vaguely in the academic world, is unambiguously depicted herein as possessing a transcendent dimension and pertaining to absolute cosmogonies or eschatologies. Moreover, the definition imposes additional constraints on the nature of myth, which has to be functional, thematic, and symbolic. Losada further distinguishes myths from other related motifs, such as symbols or archetypes, from other correlates like fantasy and science fiction, and from pseudo-myths, such as mythicised historical figures.

In doing so, Losada provides a robust mythological hermeneutic that helps myth studies establish a well-defined foundation, protecting them from misappropriation by other academic disciplines and rectifying widespread misconceptions made popular by such fields. Furthermore, the book calls for an approach that rejects dogmatism and close-mindedness, urging scholars to embark on an exploration of the profound depths and mysteries inherent in myth. It is time we put this new wine into new wineskins and set sail to a journey of innovative research, analysis, and the possible development of novel theories and fields. As Losada aptly concludes in the book, a fascinating humanistic task indeed lies ahead of us.

Author:
Jaime SEGURA SAN MIGUEL currently lecturing at Universidad Complutense de Madrid, where he is also a PhD student with a thesis *When Subject Becomes Abject: Identity and Myth in Mad Outcast Characters in the Gothic*. He has recently published "An Outcast's Identity Is No Joke: The Myth of Sisyphus in Joker" (2020) and "Prometheus Unhinged—Madness, Myth, Terrorism, and Outcast Identity in Fight Club" (2022) in *HyperCultura*, "Del Terror al Terrorismo—La Evolución Intermedial del Discurso y el Mito de la Plaga Desde la Novela Gótica a la Cultura Popular" (2022) in *Comares Literatura*, and has two upcoming articles: "Hubris and Nemesis: The Myth of Oedipus in *Crossed: Wish You Were Here"* in *Amaltea: Revista de Mitocrítica* and "Monomyth, Maddening Mothers and Identity—Mother-Daughter Relationships in a Purgatorial World" in *Editorial Oceánide*. His research interests are: Gothic literature, myth criticism, history of psychiatry.

Contact: jaimessm@ucm.es

Sorina Georgescu
Hyperion University, Bucharest

Book Review: John G. Turner, *They Knew They Were Pilgrims: Plymouth Colony and The Contest for American Liberty*, Yale University Press, 2020

Book Reviewed:
John G. Turner: *They Knew They Were Pilgrims: Plymouth Colony and The Contest for American Liberty*, Yale University Press, 2020. 464 pp, $15.74. Kindle version.

A book published in 2020 by John G. Turner, Chair Professor of Religious Studies at George Mason University in Fairfax, Virginia, author of *The Mormon Jesus: A Biography* (Harvard University Press, 2016), *Brigham Young: Pioneer Prophet* (Harvard University Press, 2014), and *Bill Bright and Campus Crusade for Christ: The Renewal of Evangelicalism in Postwar America* (The University of North Carolina Press, 2008), which won him the 2009 "Christianity Today" Book Award for best History/Biography.[67] Professor John G. Turner researches and teaches Mormonism, evangelicalism, and seventeen-century puritanism, as his page on the George Mason University website tells us.[68] He belongs to the Burke Presbyterian Church, he came of age in two "evangelical parachurch organizations, namely Young Life and InterVarsity Christian Fellowship, as his own website informs us, and he wanted to "understand the institutions and personalities that had shaped" his "own religious culture."[69]

His most recent book, *They Knew They Were Pilgrims: Plymouth Colony and The Contest for American Liberty*, written in a very pleasant, easy to read, style, has an Introduction, nineteen chapters, a Conclusion, a List of Abbreviations, Notes and Index, besides the Acknowledgements and Notes on the text, which come first. The chapters are ordered chronologically, and the author parallels the events in the colonies with those in Britain, in order to explain what happened on both sides of the Atlantic and put things in relation to one another.

This is a book about the first English colonists of New England, Plymouth Colony at the time, situated in the Eastern part of today's United States. A book about the notion of liberty as it was understood in the 1620s-1690s, about the religious conflicts and the colonists' first steps towards using and selling slaves, mostly Native Americans and less Africans, in those times and in that area. My expertise being only in African-American slavery, I was surprised to see the same treatment applied by the English to the Native population, and precisely in that area which was going to host the *Liberator* abolitionist newspaper in the nineteenth century, published by the famous white William Lloyd Garisson, in Boston, between 1831-1865.

[67] See https://uncpress.org/book/9780807858738/bill-bright-and-campus-crusade-for-christ/
[68] See https://religiousstudies.gmu.edu/people/jturne17
[69] See https://johngturner.com/about.html

Yet liberty, for the very religious English of those times, was not very much connected with our liberty, today. They had left England for Leiden, in the Netherlands, to be able to keep their religious liberty, understood in opposition towards the Anglican Church: they contested, for instance, the use of the Bible during prayers, the mass based on the *Book of Common Prayers,* or the use of the cross at baptism. For them, the Catholic Church meant the Antichrist, and their life needed to follow the Holy Scripture completely. They were called, therefore, separatist Puritans, the most radical, or protestants of the Protestants. They chose America as their destination only when the situation in the Netherlands also became intolerable. Yet, not all dared to start such a trip over the Ocean. Those who did have the courage, helped by an English merchant and smuggler, who managed to gather a group of investors around him to finance their trip, and to whom the pilgrims established at Plymouth remained indebted for a long time, were advised by the pastor remained in Leiden not to be tolerant or open minded, but to "test any idea against the firm rule of scripture" (45). He warned them "against self-satisfaction," because, he said, "even true churches, those that resembled heaven on earth, fell short of the purity and perfection revealed in the Bible" (45). And this remained their only understanding of the notion of liberty, the liberty of consciousness, as long as this colony lasted. Thus, they neither avoided, nor opposed the idea and the practice of using slaves in their new homes, or of turning other populations into slaves.

Speaking of taking Native Americans into slavery, the book tells us that English officers were motivated by a mixture of revenge and greed when they took more than three hundred Pequot Indians, mostly noncombatants, "as the spoils of war":

> For example, militia captain Israel Stoughton sent about fifty Pequot women and children to Boston. He asked to have the "fairest and largest" woman for himself. Bay Colony magistrates distributed or sold the rest. When some Pequots taken to Boston escaped, Native allies of the English recaptured them. Massachusetts officials then branded the runaways on the shoulder. Some captives ended up thousands of miles from their homes. (171)

The Governor of Providence Island referred to the Pequot captives as "cannibal Negroes from New England" (171). At the same time, however, England took pride on not having slaves on its territory. Quite erroneously, as John Turner explains us, since the merchants and other English men, "often retained African slaves as their property after keeping them in England for many years" (171), where kidnapped Natives also ended up. And yet, the British had to boast about something when they criticized their rival powers: Spain, Russia, or the Ottoman Empire. But they saw no problem in having those slaves in the colonies, since, as English explorers and merchants could see, either in Russia or in Java, slavery was as valid.

The Bible, in its turn, offered them arguments supporting the taking of defeated populations in slavery. And so did the philosophers and law theoreticians, from Aristotle to Grotius: "In a just war, or at least in a properly declared war, it was permissible to enslave one's opponents, which was at any rate more merciful than killing them. Accordingly, European powers enslaved prisoners during wartime" (172).

And yet, the author argues, the winners did not generally enslaved "noncombatants en masse" (172) at the end of intra-European wars. As for the English, they perceived "other peoples as more fit for servitude and slavery" (172). In the wars against British rule in Ireland, the English sent thousands of men, women and children to the colonies in the Caribbean Islands or to those in North America. For the already established English people in New England, slavery was "a fitting punishment for Native peoples who fought against them" (172). A punishment with an economic value—captive Natives were both workers and "commodities who could be sold in the marketplace or exported to the Caribbean" (172). A few years after the Pequot War, Massachusetts Colony would turn the enslavement of war prisoners into law: "There shall never be," magistrates declared, "any bond-slavery, villeinage and captivity amongst us; unless it be

lawful captives, taken in just wars, and such strangers as willingly sell themselves, or are sold to us" (172). The law covered, thus, both Native and African slaves.

Later on, in the years 1675-78, after yet another great war between Natives and the English, King Philip's War, caused by the same lack of obedience on the part of some of the tribes and the continuous desire of domination and control on the part of the English, manifested even by letting the cattle ruin the cultivated Indian lands, we are told, "As many as one in every ten adult English men died or suffered captivity, and dozens of English women and children perished" (296). And yet, Natives' losses were far worse: "many thousands were gone, killed on the battlefield, dead of disease and hunger, living as refugees to the west or north, or transported as slaves out of New England" (296). As a result, their population dropped by half.

What should we remain with, as a memory of this famous first American colony, if we put the myths of republicanism, democracy and religious tolerance aside? In author John Turner's vision, what the pilgrims and the other inhabitants of the colony arrived with subsequent occasions and shipments across the Ocean "left behind" is "both a complicated legacy of human bondage and unresolved debates about liberty" (366).

Author:
Sorina GEORGESCU is Ph.D. on Philology (University of Bucharest, 2015) with a thesis on slavery and abolitionism in America and Romania, a comparative cultural approach. She is an MA in American Studies (University of Bucharest, 2002), and a BA in Spanish-English (University of Bucharest, 2001). She currently teaches English at Hyperion University, Bucharest. As a researcher, she is interested in slavery and abolitionism, mostly in America and Romania (history, literature, cultural studies). Besides chief editing HyperCultura, she has her own blog, *Discussing Slavery: Conferences, Articles, Book Reviews, Translations* (https://wp.me/Pf9g6N-3E), and she has been a certified H-Slavery Network Editor since April 3, 2023.
ORCID ID: https://orcid.org/0000-0003-0595-2767

Contact: sorinamaria21@gmail.com